ETHICS AND EMBODIMENT:

AN EXAMINATION OF 'THE FEMININE' AND THE BODY IN RECENT FRENCH PHILOSOPHY

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SUMMARY

Recent French feminist thinkers have begun to expand upon a feminist perspective in philosophy which attempts to negotiate on the one hand, the implicit valuing of autonomy, universality and abstraction when these are coded as masculine, and yet on the other hand, can resist the dissemination of meaning into the free play of circuits of desire or signification. In the context of ethics, this perspective constitutes a challenge to more traditional ethical conceptions of the agent, of ethical action, and to the very parameters of the philosophical enterprise itself. It is such a perspective which forms the starting point of this study.

This study begins by articulating the paradoxes of a feminist perspective in philosophy, in the context of the work of Simone de Beauvoir, paradoxes which entail a re-examination of the parameters of philosophy as a discipline. The codification of Woman as Other simultaneously positions women as a necessary complement in dualistic divisions but also as a symbolic 'otherness'. The ambiguity of such codifications may be taken up strategically for its critical and developmental potentials in relation to philosophy. In the following chapters, the development of sexual identity as it is theorised in psychoanalysis is used to furnish a notion of 'the feminine/maternal' as symbolically negative and critical, but also located in the materiality of the body. Recent radical perspectives in phenomenology are also drawn upon to indicate a re-thinking of the epistemological ordering of subject/object, of sexual identity and of ethics, which still retain the importance of embodiment and sexual difference. The apparent requirement of some ethical 'foundation' for the development of new perspectives in ethics is examined, particularly when this is consciously or unconsciously built upon 'the feminine/maternal', either as nature or as 'divine'. Feminist perspectives in philosophy make deliberate use of such symbolic codifications, 'miming' more traditional theories of ethics, in order to draw attention to the debt owed to the forgotten 'otherness' of philosophy. It is concluded that such strategies, while complex, metaphoric and evasive, present a challenge to the discipline of philosophy and begin the project of developing theories of ethicality for feminist theory.

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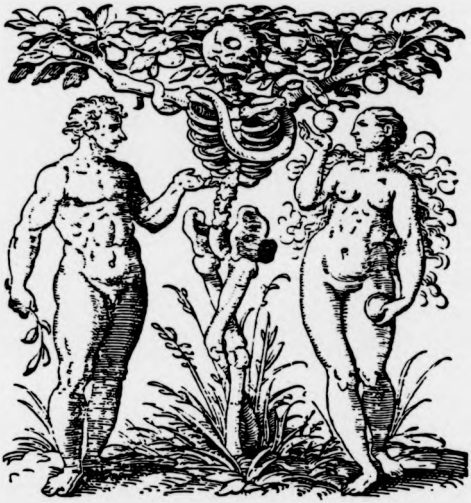

INTRODUCTION

> Woman becomes the possibility of a "different" idea.
> Luce Irigaray

Recent continental philosophy[1] has taken issue with the ethical agent at the centre of the majority of ethical theories in philosophy. As part of a critique of the Enlightenment ideals of rationality, autonomy and projects of knowledge based on a subject possessing epistemological clarity and the potential for progress in knowledge, the ethical agent is brought into question. The critique of such ideals provokes questions about their neutrality, questions which extend further back into the history of philosophy to uncover the roots of their presuppositions.

In brief, the conjunction of ideals of rationality and autonomy seems to produce an agent who, through the progressive development and application of reason, will develop a capacity for independent judgement and universalising ethical principles. Such a capacity will free the agent from the problems of empirical and relative situational judgements, which are seen to be limited, particular and contingent. The development of reason will further add to the progressive and cumulative civilisation of human nature, a teleologically directed aspiration. Value is placed upon the individual human subject, upon a capacity for reason and for universalising judgements in ethics.

The legacy of these ideals is seen in philosophy as a tendency for ethical theory to inherit the implicit value placed upon the individual, a capacity

for reason and universalising judgements. Apart from the study of the history of ethical theories in the broader context of the history of philosophy, the development of ethics has tended to concentrate upon the clarification and refinement of the above conjunction of ethical ideals.(2)

However, as continental philosophy began to question the implicit values entrenched in the apparently neutral development of thought in the philosophical enterprise, certain key themes began to emerge in such critiques. To what extent are the above ideals, elaborated in the Enlightenment optimism concerning the progress of knowledge and human nature and the egalitarian appeals to a shared capacity for reason which might culminate in universal equality (the possibility of treating each rational being as an end in themselves), actually disguising fundamental inequalities, and even perpetuating them? Political projects emerging out of Marxist and feminist theory, together with structuralist and post-structuralist theory, raise questions about the neutrality of reason and the autonomy of the human subject, as well as the possibility of knowledge and human nature as teleologically directed.(3)

In the light of these far-reaching critiques, my concern will be to raise the following questions: Is the development of ethics still possible or viable? If so, how is it possible to develop an ethics which can recognise difference, and specifically sexual difference?

These questions present difficulties for the established problems within the more traditional theories of ethics, where there is a general tendency to assume that difference is an obstacle to be overcome in approaching

ethicality, if universality is the aim of the theory. If sexuality is an example of difference, the sex of an ethical agent should make no difference to the development of the theory. If the aim is equality of treatment or the independence of the ethical agent, such initial differences need to be disregarded such that the agent can aspire to his or her autonomy, and so recognise what is rational as the 'universal' element of human beings, in encounters with others.

But if rationality, freedom of choice and a capacity for universalisability are the criteria used in identifying ethical agents, it seems that a more fundamental inequality emerges. If these capabilites are seen to be unequally distributed in human beings, those lacking such capabilites or at a less 'developed' stage on the progress towards reason and autonomy make defective or inadequate ethical agents. The comparison of the explicit ethical philosophies of philosophers central to the philosophical canon, with their views on human nature as a whole and women in particular, the implicit definition of the ethical agent, produces a serious contradiction.

This contradiction consitutes one of the basic paradoxes of ethical theory as it is activated in philosophical inquiries. A great deal of marxist, post-modernist and feminist work indicates the serious objections raised in the face of an apparently universal agent, ostensibly neutral, when the differences attributed to men and women are made explicit.[4] Although the universalism may seem to be motivated by the best of intentions: in the name of equality, or in maximising a capacity for practical reason, or to the end of furthering the progressive development of human nature as a whole,[5] such theories undermine their own intentions through a lack of attention to this contradiction.

It may seem that the ethical agent being indicted in these charges never 'really' existed, in the reductive straw-man guise that he appears to assume on occasion; a parody of unrealistic rationality and caricatured solemnity. It is only when examining classical texts in the canon of ethical writings that it becomes evident certain traits do appear with regularity and constitute a continuity in the philosophical narrative. Although such readings run the risk of collapsing the history of philosophy into a seamless narrative of 'the same', the priority of ontology and rationality in the course of Western philosophy tends to dominate.(6)

In order to support this claim it is necessary to consider the constitution of the philosophical enterprise as a process of selective choice, as to what counts as the significant set of texts which will comprise the philosophical canon. Although the texts most often challenged with prioritising rationality and universality and simultaneously making distinctions regarding their definition of human nature are not the only texts in the history of philosophy, if this challenge is accompanied by questions concerning the boundaries of philosophy as a discipline, it is possible to see reason attempting to self-legitimate itself.
Such self-legitimation is often taken to be self evident, and so not necessary to question.

> Reason is already of itself so confined and held within limits by reason, that we have no need to call out the guard, with a view to bringing the civil power to bear upon that party whose alarming superiority may seem to be us to be dangerous...' (7)

In other words, the superiority of philosophy rests upon an unquestioned and unquestionable confidence reposing in reason.

There are examples of approaches to ethics in philosophy which do not conform to this tendency, but they have tended to be shifted sideways or submerged in the interpretative narrative of philosophy as the narrative of reason constructed by successive generations.(8)

The questions I have raised present difficulties to the newly established canons of 'post-modern' writers. To suggest those thinkers who have provided the basis and motivation for feminist departures from their work also have difficulties in dealing with difference (although for very different reasons from the 'traditionalist' approach), may seem like ingratitude, not to mention the dangers of losing supportive readers in the squabbles of counter-counter criticisms. But feminist readers of writers such as Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Levinas find themselves disturbed, or confused or irritated by the recognition that they share certain views of the diagnosis of crisis or the problematic status of the humanist subject, and yet wonder if they have had time to claim a 'feminine' subjectivity before it is swept away into signification, desire, or structures of power.(9)

The main direction of this study will be to try and examine the above question(s), to draw upon the resources provided by thinkers in the recent currents of philosophy, in order to produce a speculative reading of philosophical ethics for a feminist viewpoint. In the light of more

orthodox ethical philosophy I will put the case for an ethical agent (although not the same ethical agent) which, for the purposes of this study, will be a feminine or feminist agent, in order to present sexual difference as a challenging topic to the philosophical agenda. Thus from this point of view I will seem to be flouting certain recent theoretical approaches which argue that not only is such agency dangerous, impossible or regressive, but that a feminine agent is even less desirable or attainable. Why should women seek the 'bankrupt' status of identity, if they are already positioned as a force of negativity, outside philosophy, beyond language, if this is the state that (male) philosophers appear to find desirable?

The answer is that, as the work of many feminist philosophers makes clear, from a feminist perspective, the stratifications of power(s) as symbolically realised and played out in the structures in which we live, are untouched by the relinquishing of identity in this way. To identify a 'feminine' force in language is not necessarily a feminist approach to philosophy, although it may have feminist implications for philosophy which can be developed and/or extended.

I do not mean to claim for a realm of 'real' economic relations underlying the symbolic approaches to identity and diferences activated here, or a realm of foundational biological sexual difference, since according to the methodology I will adopt, such a realm of relations would be open to question just as much as the symbolic notions of 'the feminine' I intend to explore. However, it will be my concern to argue for an approach which can take into account the struggles conducted in spheres of experience too

often neglected by a great deal of philosophy. I do not consider a feminist approach to philosophy to be a matter of reflecting upon questions of sexual difference within the existing boundaries of philosophy as it has been constituted, but to imply a consideration of the constitution of philosophical disciplines as a political issue.

This will involve expanding upon feminist work in philosophy[10] which takes into account the critique of the humanist subject, but not as a prelude to reimporting a category of experience named Woman. To reimport this universal identity, without the disruptive effects engendered by post-modern thinking, is a return to 'the same', a reintroduction of the metaphydical identity already made problematic. It remains to be seen if this question can be successfully negotiated in feminist theory. Luce Irigaray is the thinker who is most insistent that this possibility is opened up for the future. She is also, perhaps, the most utopian, and along with Emmanuel Levinas, stakes the most on ethics as a chance to intiiate new potentials for the future. Julia Kristeva is more cautious. But I will suggest it is worth taking this risk, in order to (even if strategically or hypothetically) assert the need for a reconceptualisation of otherness, which will have repercussions even beyond the narrow circles of philosophy. A naive hope perhaps, that thinking difference in philosophy will coincide with other areas of thinking, to engage with difference in a series of differences for which there is no convenient geometrical model to be enlisted as an illustration (race, poverty and wealth, age, mobility, literacy - at this point I do not want to write 'and so on', but will interrupt this catalogue abruptly; other differences will appear). However, in this study I will take a feminist perspective as my

strategy, to negotiate the dualities of material/metaphysical, reason/passion, transcendence/immanence, masculine/feminine.

The real impact of the strategy of a 'carnal ethics',(11) as Irigaray calls it, or an ethics which recognises sexual difference, or 'ethics in the feminine', is its refusal to take for granted the whole basis upon which ethics has been constructed. I will suggest a specific feminist slant to this strategy.

Rather than the codes for a life lived by a subject faced with mirror images of himself, the endless likenesses of an other encountered according to the edicts of sameness all co-existing in the reassurance of similarity, 'ethics in the feminine' would commence with the thought of difference. Hitherto, the work of ethics might have presumed itself to be concerned with masculine subjects, or has chosen on behalf of neutral subjects those characteristics deemed to be neutral, but already within the parameters of a structure codified as masculine. The encounter with the other is then subsumed under this presumption. However, the partiality of juxtaposing 'feminist' and 'ethics', acts to introduce the bias of sexual difference into an apparently neutral discipline, suggesting a different approach.

An initial and fundamental difference between subjects, prior even to the manufacture of 'ethical codes', would serve to make the relation and production of this difference the primary ethical question. In other words, rather than containing sexual difference with in the horizon of ethics as a discipline which may consider 'sexual morality' as a sub-question under its rubric, the positing of initial difference could initiate

a reconceptualisation of what ethics is and will be. The irreducibility of otherness in this context, the unavoidable confrontation of the self by an other construed as absolutely different, would act to shake the foundations of the subject's self-certainty, and by extension the foundations of an ethics based on the suppression of this difference. In this sense, the subject's conditional reliance on otherness, and with it the uncertainty into which the self is cast, may be recognised. The significance of otherness as difference is the shift it occasions from the development of ways of investigating and negotiating existence as similarity, to understanding the process of difference which shapes the very basis of subjectivity.

I will argue for a view of ethics as the production of particular kinds of subject, not the theories produced based on the actions of ethical agents. Hence if we are to gain an understanding of what ethics might mean it is via the investigation of the meaning and construction of sexual difference, not via the investigation of possible actions performed by the individual. In this context, what is possible and what can be known are not accessible through analysis based in the similarity of subjectivity, since this is a labyrinth which leads back on itself. And further, they are not 'accessible' in the same way through alternative conceptions of the same epistemological framework. Instead, the project will be to see if 'alterity' (otherness as difference) is the condition for the existence of ethics.(12)

It is important to recognise this as a strategic challenge. It would be futile to deny that ethics has always appreciated the differences between

subjects and has seen the negotiation of those differences as its concern,[13] but the starting point has generally assumed an epistemological subject in place, to which questions of agency or of action may be submitted. This has the effect of setting up a framework such that the subject/object dichotomy pervades every kind of question which might be raised about agency and knowability. In this framework the otherness which is generated is in terms of domination and appropriation - distanced by the artificial but pervasive terms of this line of philosophical inquiry, or suppressed by claims to neutrality/universalisability. The construction of this framework not only ensures that inquiries are conducted within its own terms, but also (necessarily) obscures the conditions of its construction, presenting them as foundational. The contingent nature of the framework as one possibility is hidden to guarantee coherency. But the constant slippage of the guarantee suggests that perhaps there are other possibilities.

The notion of difference which forms the basis of this inquiry is not a simple oppositional difference which leads to the attributing of essentialist qualities or identities. The notion of difference operating here will be one which accounts for both the interdependence of identities, but also the interdependence of identity and difference. Therefore although it is alterity which provides the radical nature of a challenge to ethics, sexual difference itself here must be understood not as a repetition of the epistemological organisation of self and other, but as a process.[14] This fundamental move indicates that the use of sexual difference and alterity as the basis for inquiry into ethics is a strategic gesture; that is, it is not intended as a replacement for the founding

binary distinction (subject/object), but as an intervention radical enough to expose the supposed neutrality of the ethical agent, but one which loses its radicality if sexual difference is not itself seen as a construction. Therefore I will confront the univocal coherence of rationality and attempts to universalise in ethics with sexual difference, an initial alterity. But I will also oppose constructed sexual difference as part of the limits set on analysis to protect the humanist undercurrent predicated by such limits; the binary structures which preserve and replicate the status quo.

Therefore my project will be to explore this interface, with the intention of identifying how particular kinds of subject have been produced and ossified as foundational in ethics, which will be a critical exposure of woman as other. In distinction, but with ultimately similar conclusions in mind, an exploration <u>through</u> this notion of otherness will contribute a necessarily complex but positive counter to the dissolution of subjectivity altogether.

Rather than finding this approach to throw up the kinds of paradoxes which lead Toril Moi to call a feminist perspective 'impossible' (meaning that it wants both an ontological subject and denies this, simultaneously),[15] I will argue that it is only through the intricacies of an equivocal or ambiguous approach to feminist philosophical interpretation that such interpretation can be advanced. Again, this is nothing new to feminist methodology. But I will argue that its resources provide for the development of an embodied ethical phenomenology, using the work of Julia

Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, and drawing upon Lacanian psychoanalysis and the radical phenomenologies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas.

From this work, I will develop a theorisation of sexual difference and identity in which the body may be seen as a sexualised dimension, open to otherness. In developing this line of argument, I will engage in a critique of some of the forms of understanding of otherness taken in existentialist thought, in psychoanalysis and in phenomenology, as well as trying to develop the positive aspects of these lines of thought in the context of philosophy.

CHAPTER ONE: ETHICAL AMBIGUITY: SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

In this chapter I will establish the analysis of otherness in the context of gender relations and philosophical duality, an analysis which will prove to have broad implications for the construction of a philosophical agenda and for sexual politics. The construction of both these arenas is deemed to be an ethical question in that the exposure of a merely formal commitment to neutrality and equality prompts a further examination of the issues of identity and the imbalance of power relations.

The situating of these further questions begins with the work of Simone de Beauvoir.(1) This is partly to illustrate the continuity of feminist development within the problematic of Woman as Other(2), which gives rise to notions of negative 'feminine' force with a critical edge. Examining de Beauvoir's work also allows us to question the extent to which her philosophical framework both grounds and limits the ethical expansion of her theories of emancipation and identity.

Simone de Beauvoir is a figure who is generally lauded as the 'god-mother' of feminism for her insights into the notion of 'Woman as Other', but who is also criticised for her adaptation and adherence to an existentialist framework, the most common criticisms being that any framework which places most value on creative projects and transcendence and least value on the (gendered) situating of the body is uncomfortably incompatible with feminist attempts to review both of these systems. Michèle le Doeuff(3) relates this tension to a generic discomfort between philosophy and

feminism, in that philosophy, as an historical discourse of reason, has been based on the exclusion, suppression or domination of otherness, which is the move feminism is precisely concerned to expose or undermine. However, the tension between these two modes of interpretative reading make de Beauvoir's work the privileged locus here, to explore the possibilities of negotiating the two modes in the interests of the continuing debates of philosophical feminism.

The Second Sex will provide an initial theorisation of models of exclusion and censorship concerning otherness. Secondly, it gives the foundation for a feminist account of embodiment which leads onto a philosophical theory of gender identity. De Beauvoir's accounts of biological, economic (Marxist) and psychoanalytic (Freudian) descriptions of Woman as Other, together with her objections to these positions, lead her to philosophical ground, in seeking to locate her discussion of otherness in ontology.(4)

It is the apparent disjunction between her historically situated observations about women's oppression and her abstracted discussion of ontological otherness which may seem to create apparent contradictions in her work. Rather than either suppress or attempt to overcome these contradictions, we will see how, via a discussion of The Ethics of Ambiguity, while de Beauvoir's speculations rest on an existentialist framework, her explorations of the conditions for an emancipatory consciousness and her situating of self/other relations in gender both throw the framework into question and point towards further developments of her position.

Beginning with the work of Simone de Beauvoir will provide an initial space in which to outline the problematics of this study. In de Beauvoir's writings, the background of existentialism is activated, even as its weak points are stretched to their very limits,(5) in a pre-empting of the themes which will be developed more extensively in this study. The challenge of de Beauvoir's work, read as existentialism, includes her demand that existence be seen as a spectrum of concerns (passion and irrationality as well as rationality), her view of the existent as an upsurge into the world, and her critical political engagement in questioning established social structures. In the light of these themes, de Beauvoir fulfils the radical tenets of her existentialism. But her work also opens this perspective to further questioning, which is her feminist contribution. As a feminist philosopher then, she develops themes which are still vital in current feminist thought. These themes are, primarily,

i) an existential phenomenology, which is primarily occupied with questions concerning an embodied existence.
ii) the value, nature and activity of ethics which can be developed in this context.
iii) questions concerning sexual difference.

It is The Second Sex which provides the initial characterisation of woman as other, a gendered otherness which is shown to permeate even the most seemingly innocuous and neutral of dual relations. While much feminist criticism comments on the value of this perspective, using the insight of woman as other to locate and challenge injustices, we can also see it as

beginning to articulate a challenge to philosophical methodology itself. This challenge is not just as the "existentialist ethics" [6] she claims to be writing, but as a specifically feminist theorisation of domination, colonisation and oppression located in, and yet critical of, ontology. In other words, de Beauvoir provides neither a specifically biological nor historical/economic account of woman as other, but takes philosophy to task at the very heart of its thinking of categories of otherness. Some critics read an apparent disjunction between her historical analysis of women's situation as other, and her apparently ahistorical perspective provided by her ontological standpoint, as a weakness in her work. I will suggest it is precisely this disjunction, and de Beauvoir's ability to move between different locales, which provides her perspective with the necessary fluidity for this complex set of problematics, but also ensures sufficent richness in her work for it to be still relevant to current thought. Far from being 'transcended' or overcome in successive 'waves' of feminism (an artifical historicising of conceptual approaches to questions of sexual difference),[7] her work provides a significant and sophisticated network of challenges.

We can see such challenges beginning to surface in the Ethics of Ambiguity, a work which predates The Second Sex and Sartre's rethinking of Being and Nothingness in the Critique of Dialectical Reason.[8] In this work, de Beauvoir sets out to develop an existentialist elaboration of the individual, and what it would take to account for an 'emancipatory consciousness'. Two points should be noted immediately. Apart from the implications for a feminist project conveyed in the notion of emancipation, we can also see that contradictions will arise between emancipation as a

collective project (which will require a certain reading of historical tradition, interpreting from a specific viewpoint, i.e. that of women as other), and the notion of the individual as existential agent.

De Beauvoir emphasises the fundamental ambiguity of existence, as a strategic attempt to resist totalising or homogenising moves concerning subjectivity. Such resistance will take the form of a recognition of the negativity bound up with existence, a constant fissuring of consciousness with the dimensions of non-existence. Authenticity and ethicality will be entwined with an ability to affirm this negativity. Once set in motion, this process will dynamise existence into projects of life, establishing the dialectics of metaphysical desire which motivate existence. De Beauvoir recognises the importance of this dynamism which resists 'pure inwardness or pure externality'(9) for ethics, in that it establishes meaning for projects, not as external goals but as immanent forces.

> Existence asserts itself as an absolute which must seek its justification within itself and not suppress itself. To attain his truth, man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being, but, on the contrary, accept the task of realising it.(10)

The tragic note sounded in conjunction with the affirmation of ambiguity is characteristically Kierkegaardian.(11) To be authentic in the pursuit of ethical projects involves one in the paradox of affirming the negativity of one's own existence, as 'a being whose being is not to be'. However, contrary to theological existentialists,(12) de Beauvoir stresses the humanist dimension, which throws all the responsibility onto the individual

to affirm the weight of freedom. Without any transcendent element to excuse or condone one's action, she hopes to place freedom and authenticity (and so ethics) in the domain of the agent, an intensification of these questions in a human and material aspect. Subjects are both initially free but also must struggle to attain freedom in the authenticity of their actions. Freedom is the goal of actions, and this demands the individual should engage to the utmost of his or her will. Like Kant, the participation of the agent must be as involved as possible. This maximum engagement is the salvation of ethicality from the heart of anarchy and absolute licence. De Beauvoir expresses the dilemma as follows:

> ...if man is free to define for himself the conditions of a life which is valid in his own eyes, can he not choose whatever he likes and act however he likes?...to re-establish man at the heart of his own destiny, is (this not) to repudiate all ethics?[13]

De Beauvoir will answer this objection by the intensification of responsibility in the midst of action. Ethics cannot be a passive abdication of responsibility to any other force than the individual him or her self.

Despite the focus on the individual and his or her will though, de Beauvoir seeks to avoid the universalising element of imperatives which would reunite individuals under the horizon of the ethical. Her quarrel with universalisation is the extent to which it subordinates the specificity of individuals to a greater goal, and thereby denies the value of individuality she is trying to preserve as the measure of the authenticity of projects. She wants to keep the particular nature of each agent.

In prioritising rationality too, (as the passion of the will reflected upon) she finds a denial of the spontaneity and emotion, (not to mention the negativity), which makes up the version of existence she is tracing. She writes critically of Kant; '...for (Kant) genuine reality is the human person insofar as it transcends its empirical embodiment and chooses to be universal',(14) and similarly of Hegel; 'particularity appears only as a moment of the totality in which it must surpass itself'.(15) As we will see, this critique of rational priority is the notable perspective taken by many feminist philosophers, in that it cannot account for difference because it locates ethicality solely in 'universal reason'. From de Beauvoir's perspective it is a repressive and artificial account of existence. Instead, she locates ethicality in the specificity of individuals.

> It is not impersonal universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves towards their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and irreducible as subjectivity itself.(16)

But we can note in this passage that subjectivity is given a certain irreducible value as an entity or ground for actions, despite its plurality. This focus on subjectivity and consciousness lessens the force of radicality at work in de Beauvoir's text, reinstating the universality she was critical of in Kant and Hegel. Universality reappears here as pure subjectivity.

Rationality also reappears in the valuing of conscious choice. ('his passion is not inflicted upon him. He chooses it'),(17) She is critical

of Kant for the priority of rationality at the expense of, for example passion, despair, suffering and the erotic, which amounts to suppression of the spontaneity of the agent.(18)

> (Kant) defined man as pure positivity, and therefore recognised no other possibility in him than coincidence with himself...unlike Kant, we do not see man as being essentially a positive will. On the contrary, he is first and foremost defined as negativity.(19)

Existential experience is to be contradictory and negative as well as rational, to affirm the fundamentally fractured and ambivalent character of existence ('Subjectivity radically signifies separation').(20) But freedom arises through the rejection of oppression, which requires, for de Beauvoir, an active recognition of its conditions. Although the agent is active and spontaneous, motivated by passionate inclination rather than disinterested and so disengaged duty, the recognition of distinctions between authentic and inauthentic, immanent and transcendent, demands a founding moment of epistemological consciousness. This leads her back into the validation of rationality and universality. Authenticity and the recognition of its appearance is inseparable from an awareness of one's own responsibility. While this is anchored into the individual, it is not so far from the Kantian categorical imperative in its formulation. Subject formation is made to depend on awareness of choice, which equals responsibility or duty to one's fellow man. Although this aspect of choice allows a certain degree of freedom in formulating the kinds of ethical action which can be most appropriately fulfilling, instead of binding the agent with a wooden sense of duty, it can be just as unmerciful.

Firstly, if moral action is synonymous with successful choices, harsh judgements may be made on those who make apparently 'inauthentic' choices. It makes little allowance for delusion or false consciousness and yet provides no guidelines for making choices, since decisions rest with the individual agent. In this respect, women fare particularly badly, since if they are ontologically positioned in the role of those who do not choose (as they are other, and so have had choices made for them), they may lack the possibility of making choices, and yet will be held responsible for their failure to act authentically.

We can see de Beauvoir struggling with this contradiction in The Ethics of Ambiguity in a way which highlights certain passages in The Second Sex. She recognises that an ontological elaboration of freedom, responsibility and choice assumes a universal character to subjectivity, and begins to modify this analysis by recognising the impact of social structuring on subjectivity - in other words, to acknowledge that different subjectivities may be impacted upon in different ways, according to the determinations of the situation. But this is not merely an external constraint, a denial of the conditions of freedom. De Beauvoir also considers how this constraint must have a shaping effect on the awareness of repression - its penetration to the psychic structures which generate and motivate the struggle for authenticity against oppression. This is the hitting at the very creation of such categories of responsibility. She begins to stress the interconnectedness of agents rather than their autonomy and individuality, acknowledging the common structures of meanings which allow or constrain the conditions of freedom.

> One can reveal the world only on a basis revealed by other men. No project can be defined except by its interference with other projects. ...my freedom, in order to fulfill itself, requires that it emerge into an open future; it is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future; but if, instead of allowing me to participate in this constructive movement, they oblige me to consume my transcendence in vain...they are cutting me off from the future, they are changing me into a thing.(21)

The originary freedom of individual subjectivity is cast into doubt by the limits of material oppression. She writes; 'The less economic and social circumstances allow an individual to act upon the world, the more this world appears to him as given. This is the case of women who inherit a long tradition of submission and of those who are called "the humble". However, she adds: 'There is often laziness and timidity in their resignation; their honesty is not quite complete; but to the extent that it exists, their freedom remains available, it is not denied'.(22)

In this, de Beauvoir's significant modification of the existentialist framework, Michèle le Doeuff recognises the radical perspective being created for feminism here.(23) She points out that de Beauvoir 'makes oppression equivalent to a moral failing', which has the effect of 'dramatising oppression', thereby creating a new perspective on dominant ideologies.

> She can see oppression where the dominant discourse says there is protection, or seduction, or, worse, duty. The reference to ethics remains, in any case, central.(24)

The dramatising of oppression (making it more evident in such a way as to form a critique of its process) will recur when we focus on the work of Kristeva and Irigaray. However, for now we can note that a specific perspective for such a critique is being laid down, which will coincide with the analysis of woman as other which is expanded in The Second Sex. Le Doeuff calls this 'an operative viewpoint', indicating it gives a specificity to the ethical existential challenge to oppose oppression. It names sexuality as a particular instan iation of oppressive forces, and requires the resources of an unprepared existentialist analysis to fight on this behalf.

By naming 'Woman as Other', a risk of essentialism and of pinning identity down, is taken. Perhaps this is the hesitation of which de Beauvoir writes in the Introduction to The Second Sex, ('For a long time now I have hesitated to write a book on woman'),(25) realising the danger of a replication of the duality One and Other, which eternally seems to be engaged in hostility. And an unevenly matched hostility.

> In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity.(26)

But as de Beauvoir points out, even to draw attention to this, (in that she has to qualify her position as a woman writing a book on women), is to show

there is a problem of inequality. ('...there is an absolute human type, the masculine').[27]

So far, we have seen that de Beauvoir's analysis begins to displace the category of universal subjectivity sustained in existential analysis. This is achieved by considering the impact of material conditions which will act to fix and deny some subjectivities the freedom which is assumed to be an ontological starting point. Thus on the one hand she is able to criticise an essentialist category of subjectivity, whether this is to be found in Kant and Hegel or in existentialist perspectives. She expands upon this critical point of view in The Second Sex by having recourse to the historical construction of subjectivity (which has constructed the categories of male and female as sexes). On the other hand, she is flouting the relativising of oppression which might occur in historical analysis (reducing it to circumstance), by demanding an ontological category for Woman.

Many feminist critics point to an apparent disjunction in de Beauvoir's work concerning the body. Existentialism seems to be committed to a version of the Hegelian project of transcendence, which implies that material and limiting factors are to be transcended in order to realise the freedom which lies in the future. The value of this project cannot be denied, in that it provides an impulse of revolutionary critique, a way of surpassing 'things as they are' towards 'things as they might be', and as such can produce an analysis of oppressive forces. But it seems as if

transcendence becomes aligned with classical dualisms concerning spirit and body, metaphysical and material, such that the body becomes that which must be transcended. This is complicated by the simultaneous affirmation of embodiment as a situated point of critique; we are 'in the world' just as much as going beyond its situatedness. Thus de Beauvoir's 'operative viewpoint' maps on to this problem of dualistic ambiguity, this time scissioning it with questions of sexual difference. Hence she is affirming transcendence as emancipatory, since for feminism this is what engages with a critique of material conditions. Yet this appears to lead on to a transcendence of the body, at odds with feminist attempts to affirm the (specifically) female body, in the face of its devalorised position in patriarchal cultures.

Hence if it is true that existentialist perspectives tacitly try to overcome embodiment, this does correspond to a denial of the feminine body. If the body is seen as a constraining factor which limits the scope of possible projects, then it is understandable that any move to overcome such limitations is a progressive move to liberating consciousness. De Beauvoir sems to be saying that women are more prone to awareness of embodiment through reproduction, and if this were overcome, without the 'inconveniences' of being a woman, women would be freer to affirm projects in the world. Without the limitations of maternity, women could aspire to the condition of existential subjectivity as transcendence.(28) They are momentarily held back by the institutionalised forms of marriage, motherhood and child care. But is de Beauvoir arguing that maternity is merely institutionalised unproductively, or that there is a biological 'real' which is responsible for holding women back? Her impassioned

attacks on the problems of the female body seem to echo certain misogynistic expressions of distaste.

> It has been well said that women have 'infirmity in the abdomen', and it is true they have within them a hostile element - it is the species gnawing at their vitals.(29)

An attempt to overcome the body as female is also found in feminist writers who wish to overcome the 'biology is destiny' argument.(30) The apparently most conspicuous marker of sexual difference - biological sex - is held to be responsible for discrimination, so it is this factor which must be overcome.

This part of de Beauvoir's writing corresponds to anti-essentialist arguments in feminist theory, rejecting a straightforward notion of difference which will lead to women being positioned as secondary. In keeping with existentialist assertions of freedom, it also corresponds to a demand for women's self-determination. Whether oppression is located in the realm of biology or in the realm of material/historical conditions, de Beauvoir is arguing for a dimension of escape and critique against these determinations.

But, as Genevieve Lloyd argues,(31) if transcendence is equated with a masculine realm and immanence with a feminine realm (in the dichotomies of spirit/body), then transcendence becomes transcendence of the negative realm of the feminine, a flight from that which is designated as 'women's space'. If women seek this transcendence, they will be engaged in self-defeat. Lloyd writes:

> [Transcendence] is breaking away from a zone which for the male remains intact - from what for him is the realm of particularity and merely natural feelings. For the female, in contrast, there is no realm which she can both leave and leave intact.(32)

I think the fundamental ambiguity of existence which is a characteristic of existential analyses should be recalled here. Far from being a straightforward overcoming of embodiment, there is a stress in (atheistic) existentialist perspectives on the embodied nature of existence which makes it a materialist humanism rather than a simple replay of Cartesian dualism. In other words, the situatedness of existential projects prevents us from writing off existentialism for feminism. But this does not mean it can be unproblematically elided with feminist perspectives either, as its framework resurrects categories of subjectivity which replay the ontological bias of Western philosophy in favour of Being (doubly, neutral and masculine).

Instead, we need to expand upon the play of otherness as it operates in de Beauvoir's texts - an ambiguity which draws both on an historical account of woman as other, making difference contingent and open to question, but also the positioning of woman as other which accords a specific sex to women - a notion of difference which allows women appeal to an identity of their own.

De Beauvoir's equivocation on these perspectives leads to accusations that she is both a biological essentialist and that she is arguing for sexual difference as merely cultural constructions. She is seen as a biological essentialist by those writers who find her oppositions of transcendence/immanence and spirit/body to reproduce fixed categories of masculine/feminine. She is seen as denying sexual difference by those who

focus on her insistence that difference is cultural, and so open to reformulation. This denial would free identity from determinism, to allow for a future in which differences and identities could be exchanged in some space of equality.

In this second aspect to her texts, the category of sex is seen wholly as an inherited complex of meanings which has no intrinsic essence of its own, other than the knot of identity which it produces in specific situations. It is the work of Judith Butler[33] which emphasises this aspect of de Beauvoir in a positive way. As an existentialist feminist, Butler argues from a perspective which emphasises freewill and self determination. This is a strength for feminist theory because it allows for interventions in the various construction of sexual identity.

Butler picks up de Beauvoir's assertions that 'One is not born but becomes a woman'.[34] We can find other instances of this kind of characterisation of existence as constructed.

> Doubtless, everyone casts himself into the world on the basis of his physiological possibilities, but the body itself is not a brute fact. It expresses our relationship to the world, and that is why it is an object of sympathy or repulsion...It determines no behaviour.[35]
>
> ...the body is not a thing, it is a situation.[36]

From this anti-determinist perspective, there is no biological given, but the body becomes a process of historical sedimentation. The various meanings of the body result from a whole historical network of meanings constantly being revised and either affirmed or discarded. Any

understanding of the body then would be consonant with the way such understandings are fulfilled, or embodied. Thus a denial of biological sex would be read not as a refusal of the body, but a strategic method of pointing to its historical construction; the ways this occurs and the meanings accrued around it would then be specific, not absolute. Despite appearing to present an argument for the all-pervasive effects of ideology such that there is no 'objective' space from which to assess the validity or otherwise of various representations of the body, Butler wants to argue that the 'real' is the constant transmission and regeneration of meanings in a cultural context. Thus biology is part of a set of meanings which draw their relevance from their encoding in very specific circumstances. Within such circumstances they can have localised dimensions of truth and falsity, but such values are always kept available for review. In terms of the understanding of the body, this would mean there could be a set of meanings about sexual difference which might be more entrenched than others, but this set of meanings would operate on a series of levels or axes which was flexible. As the dialectic of understanding such meanings moved in its process, more radical possibilities thrown up could be incorporated, thus making the whole conception of identity more fluid. Butler's position is similar to Foucault's regarding the construction of sex, but Butler goes against Foucault in aspiring to maintain an ethical/feminist perspective, one which could still judge.(37) Butler interprets de Beauvoir's notion of 'becoming' a woman not merely as the fulfilment of pre-given categories of sex, but in an existentialist sense of a willed process on behalf of the subject to actively take on the enactment of identity. This means that gender becomes a project. The stress on activity means that gender is a constant and unending effort of

exercising freedom; even if it seems that oppressive forces are determining one's identity, or that the perfect state of embodiment as a woman has been reached, identity is still 'in fact' a struggle to sustain that figure; its continuity is dependent on the effort required to maintain it consistently. In Butler's formulation, the body becomes

> ...a field of cultural possibilities that are enacted and mobilised in various ways, and we might think of the body as the theatre of gender, the sites of received cultural meanings, and yet also the place of their reproduction and variation.(38)

This apparently gives identity the potential for subversion and change, such that gender could be re-worked on one's own terms. Refusing to take the human body as a 'natural fact', gradual shifts in understanding and interpretation might be effected. Butler evokes de Beauvoir when she writes 'What if gender were nothing but the acts which realise it?' She is optimistic that such a subtle modification of stereotypes will bring about a shift to ' the proliferation of gender beyond binary oppositions'.(39) There are certain problems with this perspective which arise in the context of freewill and determinism. Butler seems to argue that determinisms acting on identity could be overcome by sheer force of will; realising one's choices will provide for ways to negotiate stereotypes. But it is not clear what the motivation for such acts of will would be or how they could arise, through the representation and recognition of choices perhaps? But this is to come back to a question of rational cognis of choices, which is problematic if women are positioned as the irrational other. As Butler realises, choosing to become the other is to actively become the

identity which doesn't choose, pure body and identity frozen by the gaze of the Self.

> As Other, women are not devoid of choice; rather they are constrained to choose against their own sense of agency and so distort and undermine the very meaning of choice...For de Beauvoir, it seems, we must understand the gender of woman as that particular modality that is culturally constrained to choose against itself.(40)

But I think this problem is thrown up by Butler's position too, since she emphasises choice and responsibility, but without marking how deeply determinations might run, or in what name choices are to be made. In her later work, Butler recognises that it is a question of where the boundaries between freedom to choose and determining forces acting upon identity are drawn.(41) Since certain constraints will inhere in the networks of signification, there cannot be a total freedom of gender roles, to be freely chosen by either sex. Clusters of meaning will retain masculine and/or feminine markings. Such markings make the notion of sexual difference meaningful in the first place. They also provide the position from which to desire to be 'other'. Many feminist writers have made this critical point in response to Derrida's wish for freedom from determining gender roles. Derrida sees sexual difference as a binary opposition, which he would like to deconstruct in his playful dream of a future sexual dance in '...the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating'.(42) Choreographed by whom? Such strategic mimicry depends upon some level of fixity concerning identity being assumed. Perhaps the problem lies not with the desire for a play of significations, but the manner in which gender boundaries are maintained and the relative power of the individual who desires to be 'other'.

process.

De Beauvoir herself describes the project of an androgynous future as 'useless and utopian'. She says she is not looking to abolish difference, but to locate it in a social setting, such that signification is open to change; while at the same time she denies any difference at the fundamental 'level of enunciation'.

> Women simply have to steal the instrument, they don't have to break it...we must use language. If it is used in a feminist perspective, with a feminist sensibility, language will find itself changed in a feminist manner... For me, (difference) comes from the social situation. I consider it almost anti-feminist to say that there is a feminine nature which expresses itself differently, that a woman speaks her body more than a man.[43]

Here de Beauvoir is resisting any determinations of identity which might be seen as putting essentialism or biologism back in place. In so doing, she locates both oppression and the conditions and possibilities of addressing it in the realm of signification, the transmission of social and cultural meaning. This implies she is maintaining a view of such processes as fundamentally neutral, rational, communicative and ordering, at the expense of those forces which she herself has broached as radical. Signification is the public space of projects and creativity, where women could compete if they only aspired to the cultural ideals of literature already in place. De Beauvoir places her faith in the canon of great art which has been valourised in what she takes to be an objective history of evaluation.

This is a question of control, over the process of signification and over the dangerous Pandora's box which is opened up by naming woman as other. If 'woman' is metaphorically placed as disruptive force, as that which reminds subjectivity of its failure to surmount the ambiguity at its heart, and as other identity which challenges and provokes the passage of masculine transcendence, de Beauvoir cannot expect to contain this powerful disruption in her own texts.

She resists the relinquishing of identity to the vicissitudes of historical process because this threatens the notion of choice and autonomy which will be important for feminist critique (as well as for ethical existentialism). Hence the framing of feminine identity is still couched in terms of scrambling to catch up with masculine subjectivity;

> ...as Virginia Woolf has made us see, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, have had to expend so much energy negatively in order to free themselves from outward restraints that they arrive somewhat out of breath at the stage from which masculine writers of great scope take their departure; they do not have enough strength left to profit by their victory and break all the ropes that hold them back.(44)

She also resists the notion of any unconscious forces eroding the sovereignty of subjectivity. Her critique of Freud is based on an analysis of the deterministic aspect given to biology in his work. She focusses on the constraints this implies, criticising the biological account given of the psychic forces (which lessen the control and responsibility accorded to the agent), and resists seeing the radical potential of such forces, particularly when they are aligned with the cultural codification of femininity - other, disruptive and irrational.(45)

Thus far we have identified two forces at work in de Beauvoir's texts; one which leads her to analyse woman as alternative identity constituted as other, the second which rejects any form of identity and argues that such positions are historically constructed. Rather than dismissing this contradiction as inconsistency, I will argue that such equivocation is necessary for understanding sexual difference ethically. This will form our basic position for the following chapters. Kristeva and Irigaray follow up on the analysis of woman as other, while simultaneously criticising the whole category of subjectivity. This double critique owes a debt to de Beauvoir. But the developments of psychoanalysis and accounts of signification which stress the way that representation is not just communicative and corresponding, but also betrays its own conditions of presentation, bring into question even the frameworks which articulate her version of otherness.

If de Beauvoir makes woman other, then she also recuperates such otherness in the resolution of an Hegelian dialectic. Despite identifying woman as other to the masculine/neutral subject, which represents a demand for women to have an identity other to that which is shaped for them, but is also a challenge to the epistemologically dominating subject, the structures of subjectivity are called into question only to be reinstated again. Even though otherness is shown to be permeating the very structures of individuality, in the forces of negativity which are meant to drive existence (such that to be is to be other, even to oneself), these forces merely serve as motivation and are reconstrained in the interests of projects of ontological and epistemological control. De Beauvoir provides the radical grounds for a critique of the determinations which place woman

as other, but in restoring the categories of subjectivity and the narrative of history as objective truth, she closes off a more radical version of otherness which might provide disruption even in the sanctity of these structures.

But I wish to resist definitive readings of de Beauvoir which fix her as either 'the "good" founding mother of modern feminism or the "bad" phallic perpetrator of humanism rationalism', as Rosi Braidotti puts it,(46). It is evident that her texts could be interpreted in these ways. But instead, her questions will lead to further examination of the problems we began with.

We have seen that the question of otherness is crucial for an ethical approach to difference, because it gives a material situatedness to intersubjective relations, and allows questions of sexual difference to impinge upon the philosophical understandings of subjectivity and agency. However, if it is to resist recuperation into the structures which produce and restrain such categories, a further radicalisation of otherness is required. This requirement leads us to examine the work of Kristeva and Irigaray. Here we will find that the symbolic figuration of woman not just as other but as 'other to the other', as the sex which does not exist or is not one at all, is taken up as a strategic appropriation of absence and the unrepresentable in order to challenge the very conditions of representation and question its structures. As Judith Butler writes:

> Women are not only represented falsely within the Sartrean frame of signifying-subject and signified-other, but the falsity of the signification points out the entire structure of representation as

inadequate.[47]

Here she implies that the dominant view of representation as mimetic is to be brought into question. In the next chapter we will consider how Kristeva and Irigaray activate the representation of woman as other (when this otherness is also absence and negativity) to unsettle the frames of such representation.

CHAPTER TWO: NEGATIVITY, FEMINISM AND THE FEMININE

The next few chapters will consider the increasingly complex theorisation of otherness that feminist theoreticians in France have drawn upon, to account for not only the situating of Woman as other, but to combine the forceful critique this provides with an analysis of identity which stresses not the mastery of identity, but its vulnerability to the displacing effects of desire and the unconscious. Whereas de Beauvoir stresses the control which must be exerted in struggling for equality and autonomy, this view of identity and otherness will maintain that such levels of control are not available. In this respect, feminist attempts to unsettle the view of identity which prioritised rationality and its alignment with values of masculinity, coincide with the psychoanalytic displacement of consciousness by forces which call into question the epistemological basis of subjectivity.(1) Such forces will be seen, in addition, not as bodily processes of desire, but as linguistically constructed and disrupted, in accordance with Lacanian theory concerning structuralism and psychoanalysis. The unconscious is not a biological force but a more pervasive force, manifest in systems of representation and language. Such a view emphasizes difference not only as difference between the Same and the Other in an intersubjective sense, but as operative in the very systems of signification which create and sustain such categories of subjectivity. In addition, I will examine the codification of such forces as feminine.

In the following chapter, I will draw upon the work of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, thinkers who inherit the recognition of the problematics of otherness from Hegel, Sartre and Lacan,(2) but who also infuse such

theories with additional theorisations of otherness as feminine. Although Kristeva and Irigaray make few references to de Beauvoir, I will briefly identify how their work will elaborate upon the questions I have suggested de Beauvoir has raised.

So far, we have seen that a connection has been established between sexual difference and the polarities of self/other, autonomy/dependency, spirit/body. De Beauvoir's insight has allowed this connection to be made from a specific (feminist) viewpoint, which is to say, she has made it possible to politicise the understanding of these divisions. Apparent neutrality is thus opened up for analysis as an imbalance of power, a position which will have repercussions for any discussion of ethics which has recourse to a certain liberalist ancestry. The question of difference has been raised in the context of de Beauvoir's characterisation of Woman as Other, and in the tension this creates in relation to the existentialist project of autonomy.

However, de Beauvoir returns to her existentialist/humanist framework when discussing a possible feminist ethics. She stresses the struggle women must engage in to compete equally with men, but she does not submit the very framework - which inscribes possible projects and the notion of creativity itself - to question.

We can recognise Kristeva's objections to de Beauvoir in the following passage from 'Women's Time':

> In its beginnings, the women's movement, as the struggle of suffragists and existential feminists, aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history. in this sense, the movement, while immediately universalist, is also deeply rooted in the socio-political life of nations. The political demands of women; the struggles for equal pay for equal work, for taking power in social institions on an equal footing with men; the rejection, when necessary, of the attributes considered feminine or maternal in so far as they are deemed incompatible with insertion into that history - are all part of the logic of identification with certain values: not with the ideological (these are combatted, and rightly so, as reactionary), but, rather, with the logical and ontological values of a rationality dominant in the nation state.(3)

Irigaray writes:

> 'Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre always resisted psychoanalysis. I have trained as an analyst and that is important...for thinking sexual identity. I also belong to a philosophical tradition in which psychoanalysis takes its place as a stage in understanding the self-realisation of consciousness, especially in its sexuate dimension.(4)

Psychoanalytic theory is valuable to feminist theory, in that it suggests the process of constructing identity involves the exclusion or suppression of certain forces, processes occurring on macro and micro levels. Such a model of exclusion or supression take place not only in the socio-symbolic sphere, but also, as Irigaray suggests, within the process of sexual identity formations. Kristeva and Irigaray attempt to account for intra-psychic divisions as well as intersubjective relations of difference.(5) As Kristeva writes;

> 'Underlying causality' - a figure of speech that alludes to the social contradictions that a given society can subdue in order to constitute itself as such. But a figure of speech that is also used to designate that 'other scene'; the unconscious, drive related and transverbal scene whose eruptions determine not only my speech or my interpersonal relationships, but even the complex relations of production and reproduction which we so frequently see only as dependant on, rather than shaping, the economy.(6)

Kristeva is not suggesting we take on unproblematically the causality referred to in this passage; the forces which are constituted as disruptive are given a figuration as causal but this does not mean they are reductively 'real' origins. She calls them 'figures of speech' to draw attention to the way she considers them to be symbolically constituted, and in this respect unsettling of causal relations. This point will be important in that it refuses to posit an underlying experiential domain of forces and drives, and hence risk reinstating desire as fundamentally biological.

Psychoanalysis provides a theoretical framework for a 'philosophy of desire', the movements of an intentional force which is activated dynamically towards an other as object of desire. This intentional force is given an embodied context in sexual difference. But it simultaneously undermines a subject/object distinction constituted in terms of an opposition, through the disruptive agency of the unconscious. It is therefore effective in expressing difference as both sexed and heterogeneous.(7)

In this chapter I will argue that the feminist perspectives on psychoanalysis developed by Kristeva and Irigaray utilise the insights of psychoanalytic theory on the dynamic and intentional aspects of desire and the heterogeneity of the unconscious. But they also raise important questions about the limitations of psychoanalysis if it theorises sexual difference through perceived biological difference, or as generated by the processes of linguistic multiplicity.

In the introduction to her book Feminism and Psychoanalysis, Jane Gallop writes;

> Psychoanalysis, for instance, can unsettle feminism's tendency to accept a traditional, unified, rational, puritanical self - a self supposedly free from the violence of desire. In its turn, feminism can shake up psychoanalysis's tendency to think itself apolitical but in fact conservative by encouraging people to adapt to an unjust social structures.(8)

Both Irigaray and Kristeva seek to recapture a privileged site coresponding to an experiential body, such that women can lay claim to a site of agency. But both want to avoid the pitfalls of a category of experience which could be construed as self-present, known unproblematically. To this end, they move towards a phenomenological reading of psychoanalytic theory from a feminist perspective.(9) The possibility of reading the encounter with the other as a validated experience of the lived body, taking place according to the structures of desire, is combined with their elaboration upon the connection made between 'the feminine' and negativity. If the feminine acts as a negative force, it can act to displace the subject as unified and self-present. But this development is a 'strategic' appropriation of the feminine as negative, and as such involves an ironic stance in relation to this equation.

If this radically different notion of experience is sustainable it will form the basis for a different version of ethics.

I Lacan and feminism

Feminism's problematic relation with psychoanalytic discourse may be due in part to the production of the subject category 'Woman'. Psychoanalytic theory takes on this category and may show the extent to which identity and sexuality are constructed by conflicting and quasi-deterministic forces, as well as indicating the permeation of such forces to psychic structures. At the same time there is an acknowledgement of the sexuate nature of structure and economies which are ostensibly neutral.(10) Hence on one level it provides a generalisable account of the forces of identity construction, cross-culturally and trans-historically. Despite the dangers of a kind of 'universal identity' which this analysis courts, it does give a certain force to an analysis of sexual difference. The dominant forces which perpetuate a structure of woman as other need to be negotiated at this level in certain contexts. But many feminist critics are concerned about what seems to be a critical impasse produced by the contradictions of, on the one hand, the ontological status of Woman as political agent and, on the other, the analysis of subjectivity as a site or intersection of different forces as part of a resistance to totalities, the destabilisation of 'metaphysical identities' in an attempt to go beyond binary logics.

The discourse of feminism itself produces a subject, then seeking to emancipate that subject from the very constructions which allowed it to be produced in the first place.(11) We cannot, therefore, expect a simple resolution of the ambiguities which arise from this situation. I will

suggest that while a hypostatised or essentialist notion of identity is unproductive for a development of radical feminine alterity, as women will continue to be addressed and oppressed in a site named as other, it is necessary to concern ourselves for some time longer with the discourses of the subject, although attempting to develop in a non-oppositional and non-essentialising way.

The force of feminist theory influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis is a kind of 'return of the repressed'.[12] The unnameable and unrepresentable feminine, coded as an ideal (Woman) is accorded the power of disruption and destabilisation. This power seems to be particularly effective in the context of psychoanalysis and philosophy, disturbing schemas of identity and the effaced question of sexual difference with an insistent questioning. Where disciplines set up an implicit order of the same, which embraces a hierarchy of masculine over feminine, coding the feminine as radical heterogeneity is intended to unfix the fantasy of fixation. While this move is relatively easy to see on a symbolic level - the undefinable, non-essential nature of feminine negativity is a force, emphatically not an identity - the problems arise if we want to politicise this notion. Some writers consider that the more radical move is to retain feminine negativity in its uncodified, disruptive characterisation.[13] Any attempt to realise it will merely recuperate its radicality and constrain it back within the dominant economy it was meant to interrupt. The move from symbol to particular instantiation (Woman to women), they suggest, should be resisted. But we must question the extent to which this refusal can be sustained in an apparently self-conscious way. I will argue that the codification which connects the metaphorical force of negativity with the

feminine already impinges on women as 'lived bodies', and therefore must be acknowledged. Failure to do so allows the dominant economy to name that relation anyway, and in a powerfully constricting fashion.

The slippage of the construct Woman, as that which both facilitates language and designates an irredeemably Other realm as feminine, into women and the particularity of their supplementary, inexpressible jouissance, apparently codes women with the excessive, ex-centric and ecstatic; not only symbolically outside the social contract, but excluded from access to power in a social context. The absent Woman symbolises the primordial origin in the guise of the pre-Oedipal mother, giving birth in an act of supreme passivity to the initial divisions of difference, and necessarily suppressed and repressed to allow such divisions to come to be. This figure of primary narcissism is re-presented as a site of unmediated jouissance, unrestricted and unconstrained, a phantasmic backwards projection to a prior moment of expressivity. There is supposedly no necessary connection with the subsequent gender identification which takes place in relation to the flesh and blood mother, but Lacan elides the metaphorical function of the ideal mother with women-as-such, so while on one level there is no essence of Woman, this move may also deny the agency of women.

> ...the woman does not exist. The woman can be perfectly well delineated, since it is all women, as you might say. But if women are 'not all'? Then if we say that the woman is all women, it is an empty set. (14)

Similarly, Lacan's shifting of the castration complex from the biologically deterministic organisation around the penis to the supposedly more neutral

term of the phallus indicates no necessary connection between visual lack and lack as such (the vicissitudes of desire). The phallus is meant to negotiate the sexualised connotations of biological difference, standing for a generalised loss of heterogeneous jouissance with entry into the Symbolic, a linguistic construct for the shared experience of 'castration' for both male and female.

Two points need to be made in relation to Lacanian theory at this stage. Firstly, the designation of the phantasmic ideal of Woman as the archaic Mother may be read as confining women to a biological determinism, or reforging the equation of women with a solely maternal function, positioning her as the 'natural' realm of chaos and continuum outside or beyond the ordering of 'civilised' culture.
Secondly, it is clear that the phallus retains its links with biology despite Lacan's extravagant claims for its linguistic status as the 'signifier of signifiers' and its arbitrary associations. In its role as ideal symbol it supports the continuity of the status quo and the hegemony of masculine power. Meaning is equated with the masculine, the 'vital flow' of signification and the one-to-one correspondance of truthful description underline the political and topological impulses dictating the choice of this signifier.

> ... this signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation and also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is equivalent there to the (logical) copula.(15)

Lacan even acknowledges this connection himself his later work as he begins to explore the phenomenal and topological spacing of the body. 'For what is the phenomenal being of the subject if not to all intents and purposes a body?...a form drawn from the most salient and, so to speak, the most conspicuous organ of procreation...chosen on account of its erectibility'.(16) Given that here Lacan is concerned with the way the body is symbolically understood rather than a direct perception of the body, we must still question how distinct from Freud this position is. In its very construction the Lacanian framework is emphatically unfeminist. Lacan's obedience to the constituted field of metaphor is a constricting starting point. Nevertheless, Lacan accords women a kind of power, the possibilility of disrupting signifying systems albeit without the agency of identity to do anything other than constantly disrupt, efface, move on.

> I believe in the jouissance of the woman in so far as it is something more, on condition that you screen off that something more until I have properly explained it.(17)

An attempt of the master to retain his mastery?

II 'Any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine"

At the beginning of her book *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, Irigaray states her belief that sexual difference is the burning issue of our age, the issue of difference which potentially could be 'our salvation on an intellectual level... the production of a new age of thought, art, poetry and language; the creation of a new poetics'.(18) The development of this event is hampered and constrained by the systematic repetition of sameness

being compulsively reiterated in the spheres of philosophy, politics, religion and science. Whether this is a preoccupation with degeneration and destruction or a lament for conformity, it amounts to a re-working of the same ground, the reversal or proliferation of existing values which Irigaray lists as

> ...the consumer society, the circular nature of discourse, the more or less cancerous diseases of our age, the unreliable nature of words, the end of philosophy, religious despair or the regressive return to religion, scientistic imperialism or a technique that does not take the human subject into account, and so on.(19)

According to Irigaray, this repetition works to conceal or efface a possible mode of articulating alterity which, she thinks, can take place in the context of the question of sexual difference.

Why privilege sexual difference? Her reasons for promoting this belief lie in her specific appropriation of psychoanalytic discourse, particularly the work of Lacan, which also includes strategic departures from it. Psychoanalysis has enabled a theoretical treatment of sexuality and identity to take place via the (generalisable) analysis of forms of patriarchal identity as constructions, and the permeation of such forces to psychic levels. Its usefulness rests in some part on its capacity to analyse the symbolism of masculine and feminine as a pair of terms which pervade wide and various sets of relations, such that the symbolisation becomes tangled up in the very process of conceptualisation. The common oppositions of the Pythagorean table of opposites(20) become aligned with a symbolic interpretation of anatomical difference, and, significantly, the unified, non-contradictory and homogenous terms come to dominate. Across a range of systems and at different levels, exclusion and censorship operate

to prioritise the masculine term at the expense of the feminine, such that the very operation itself is obscured from view. The status quo is maintained at the price of a peculiar violence. As regards subjectivity, masculine/feminine forces may become aligned with male and female, but the very notion of subjectivity itself has already been appropriated to the masculine.

The deterministic implications of the way these constructions are internalised is offset somewhat by the notion of the unconscious. The unconscious can act as a constant reminder of the failure of this internalisation process, 'a resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life', as Jacqueline Rose writes.(21) The splits, forcings and divisions of psychic life place pressure against the notion of coherent identity, a widespread replay of an incomplete adjustment to the norm. This moment of failure, negativity, fluidity/formlessness, is symbolically bound up with the feminine. As Rose suggests, feminism can recognise certain similarities with its own project - a symbolic 'failure to adjust to normality'(22) and the resistance which accompanies it.

Dissent takes up a strategically oppositional place to a position identified as dominant, in order to identify the power relations of exclusion. The dangers of occupying a marginalised position are, obviously, the dangers of celebrating difference but being irrelevant, or of being recuperated back into the dominant ideology which can easily incorporate straightforward opposition. Feminism has had to negotiate the double mine-field of either

a) enthusiastically embracing the decentring of subjectivity only to find no political position to speak from (the relatively recent struggle for a feminine subject is not to be surrendered so lightly), or, b) the politically active subject with the ontological status Woman, which may turn out to be 'the repressive re-enactment of a metaphysical authority'; the replay of a universalisiable self in an era which has attested to the inadequacy of such a self.

It is through her understanding and seizure of a certain lack of synchronisation therefore, that Irigaray situates her project.(23)

In the context of philosophy, she announces her desire to 'have a fling with the philosophers',(24) paradoxically to indicate the seriousness of her engagement with philosophical questions. She means to be as intimate and familiar with philosophical history as possible, but also to challenge it from the position of a woman; that is one who is symbolically positioned outside or other to philosophy, one who can only 'flirt' with ideas, or conversely, deflate them by being too playful, refusing to take them seriously. This positioning allows her to follow through some of the main canonical texts of Western philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Meister Eckhardt, Descartes, Hegel, Spinoza, Plotinus, Kant, Marx, Freud),(25) reconstructing their logic carefully in order to show how it interrupts itself. What she calls 'the blind spot in an old dream of symmetry',(26) the hidden assumption so necessary to the symmetry and so necessarily hidden, will entail analysing philosophy's unconscious.

For Irigaray, what is repressed is 'the feminine', that which allows philosophy to get off the ground, but must remain essentially unspoken, as the ground. The negativity of symbolically occupying this groundless

ground constantly places women in an impossible position.(27) What she proposes instead is a particular conception of psychic health to counteract these moves, which would involve the adequate conceptualisation of both masculine and feminine elements in a non-hierarchical exchange and process. However, we are far from this stage.(28) The feminine is still inadequately conceptualised. It is only by intervening on the destructive circuit that another age of difference might be broached, an intervention which Irigaray nominates as ethical.(29)

III Kristeva's theorisation of negativity

There is a certain continuity in Kristeva's work concerning the notion of negativity, despite her quite large-scale shifts in position in other areas of her work.(30) Through a complex intersection of theories she attempts to develop a notion of a material/linguistic force which is disruptive for identity but also located in the corporeal space of the body. There is an attempt to balance the material or embodied aspect of the subject with the metaphysical force of negativity, often verging on a quasi-mystical understanding in her later work when it is discussed in relation to theology, or towards aesthetics or politics in relation to the avant-garde.(31) The heterogeneous relation of both embodiment and the force of negativity will be significant in subsequent explorations of the ethicality with which Kristeva endows them; particularly as this is characterised as feminine, the heretical ethics of the maternal body and jouissance. Kristeva makes clear that for her, as for Hegel, negativity is not merely nothingness or negation, the diametrical opposition of positivity or identity.(32) But in order to sustain its disruptive characterisation it

cannot be subsumed under the same logic of identity which operates between disparate and discrete identities.

> Although negativity is a concept and therefore belongs to a contemplative (theoretical) system, it reformulates the static terms of pure abstraction as a process, dissolving and binding them within a mobile law...(33)

Negativity as process characterises the relation between identity and difference as inseparability and interpenetration. The Hegelian logic is not merely an external relation but inscribes its force of production, driving the contradictions which motivate the processes of desire. What Kristeva theorises, however, is an excess of otherness which interrupts the dialectic in such a way as to invade the process and continuity of being. This will be shown to be a non-telological, resisting synthesis.

> A negativity inseparable from the Hegelian notion of Being is thus precisely what splits and prevents the closing up of Being within an abstract and superstitious understanding... it prevents the immobilisation of the thetic, unsettles doxa and lets in all the semiotic motility that prepares and exceeds it.(34)

Kristeva objects to the Hegelian recuperation of the force of identity and difference into the pure form of thought, the abstraction of Force. She reintroduces a certain materiality (instantiation of the subject) and prior division (the scissions of the semiotic which intervene on any founding notion of consciousness) acting as constant disruption. Because the Hegelian consciousness finds its reality in rational expression, that is, thought, ultimately it cuts itself off into a pure inner space which becomes void, while heterogeneity remains an externalised force. The

totalising process of the dialectic denies the ethical admission of otherness in anything other than an external sense, feeding the ego of self-consciousness and recuperating difference through violence.

> In conceiving radical negativity as an expression the idealist dialectic deprives itself of negativity's powerful moment; the scission that exceeds and precedes the advent of thetic understanding...
>
> This impeccable logic (Force as expression) constitutes signifying unity on the basis of explosions - scissions, impulses, collisions, rejections - yet they remain driven back in the name of and in view of the subjective unity not only of the Understanding but also of reason, which is necessary, because it assures the assertion of reality.(35)

The real impact of negativity is obscured in this frozen circularity - since this is the process which underlies, precedes and guarantees the circle. To disrupt the circle, not only repetition but displacement is required, an ex-centric sideways move contextualised in psychoanalytic discourse.

IV Subversion through signification

For Kristeva, Lacan's 'return to Freud' (his reworking of Freud)(36) which engendered the shift from biology to a linguistic shaping of sexuality and identity, provides a space for some form of subversion. If sexual difference is implicated in the conceptual framework itself, Kristeva's characterisation of language as a shifting process of the production and decay of meaning allow her a potential for mobility on the question of identity formation. The Freudian focus on a visible/biological structure seems very limiting in the light of the fluid freeing of sexual difference into the Symbolic arena. But in some ways all that has happened is a

shifting of the terms of formation. Lacan's point that an initial framework of cultural reference is necessary to guarantee any subsequent account of sexual difference negates any simplistic biological starting point. Now that difference is produced by systems of meaning, there is no direct access to a pure biological understanding of physical bodies, since it would be impossible to recognise those bodies outside of the system of meaning. This is the basis of the development of the imaginary, the realm which severs full cognisance of the body and renders its relation metaphorical or 'morphological'. This notion is developed in much more detail in Kristeva and Irigaray, since the possibilities of intervening strategically on the imaginary with its metaphorical/linguistic connotations, rather than biological ones, are much more promising.(37) If identity is seen as structuration rather than development through time, the issue shifts from questions of anatomical difference (at what point in development do differences appear) to questions as to what such differences mean within the symbolic, and the extent to which they are open to subversion.

The focus of Kristeva's work on femininity is governed by this understanding. If the structuration of identity is at the level of socio-symbolic, but this process is constantly invaded by the 'language' of the semiotic, then its stability is called into question. Perhaps by insisting upon the disruptive rather than the constitutive elements of language, a sufficently transgressive notion of the subject can be produced to allow it ethical access to the other?

In her 1974 essay 'The Ethics of Linguistics',(38) Kristeva is critical of theorists who focus on language as a homogeneous, logical system with

internal coherence. It would seem she has in mind the priority of communicability, consensus and competence seen in the work of Saussure, Chomsky and in Lacan's symbolic. While on the one hand she sees this preoccupation as 'a bulwark against irrational destruction and sociologising dogmatism'(39) and an advance on the individual 'making' or creating an utterance, she identifies a certain overcompensation. The fear of reinstating a transcendental ego as origin or source of meanings leads to the prioritising of rational and sensemaking elements of language, at the expense of those marginal elements of linguistics which, she suggests, may provide greater insight into the connection of the material subject and the materiality of signification.

Kristeva theorises the poetic and artistic 'pathologies' of language in a different way from more traditional linguists, who had seen these forms of language as continuous with conventional signification, but less successful. If the formal practice of language uses is emphasized, these deviant practices are judged according to their conformity to, or deliberate flouting of the rules. Any somatic connection was feared to reintroduce 'subjective' elements, so for example the problematics of Chomskyan generative grammar were classified as 'extra-linguistic' concerns.(40) Kristeva seeks to identify a connection, but as she makes clear, it is a productive and dynamic relation she is interested in, not a relation of stasis. She takes pains to separate her own theorisation of the subject in process from two more static models.

1. Certain theorists developed a model in which the relation between signifier and signified is not purely arbitrary but 'motivated'; a direct

oralising of certain somatic drives and forces. Kristeva notes that this approach validates elements which had been neglected in linguistic theory.

> (This theorisation) seeks the principle of this motivation in the Freudian notion of the unconscious, insofar as the theories of drives (pulsions) and primary processes (displacement and condensation) can connect 'empty signifiers' to psychosomatic functionings, or at least can link them in a sequence of metaphors and metonymies; though undecidable, such a sequence replaces arbitrariness with articulation...Such a linguistic theory... restores to formal linguistic relations the dimensions (instinctual drives) and operations, (displacement and condensation, vocalic and intonational differentiation) that formalist theory excludes.(41)

However, Kristeva argues that, although this aspect of 'extra-linguistic' theorising acknowledges the realm of the unconscious and therefore does not re-introduce a subject of self-reflection, it does not account for the transitional move into an arena already invested with symbolic meanings. This transition will be developed in respect of her notion of the 'chora', which will be discussed in the next section.

2. The second aspect concerns the placing of the phenomenological subject and the thetic. Kristeva is distinguishing her theory from a Husserlian transcendental ego, since its positing, even if undemonstrated, indicates a substrate acting as a ground and guarantee of meaning.(42) The transcendental ego reveals its limitations when it is shown itself to be irreducible in reduction, and becomes the locus of the recuperation of unity. Once again, there is a kind of stasis, a 'bracketing out of all that is heterogeneous to consciousness'(43) which corresponds to a certain denial of difference. What is useful, however, is the notion of positionalities and the experiential dimension of 'placing', the way a

subject reacts and responds to signification. 'We see that Husserlian phenomenology might serve as the bridge leading to an interrogation of the very positionality of the speaking subject'.(44)
It is clear that the thetic 'placing' remains important, since this possibility of identity is what makes the recognition of divisions and boundaries possible. The communicative dimension of language involves some denial of otherness in its universality, as individuals are initiated into its structures. But it cannot wholly erase the traces of meanings which remain other, haunting each moment of construction and destruction. If it attempts to do so , 'it renders invisible the infrastructure of otherness through whose means, as it were, language speaks'.(45)

Kristeva questions the assumptions of rationality in the phenomenological method, as well as the boundary between what is 'properly' the subject of linguistics and the extra-linguistic. By identifying an arena of non-verbal signifying practice (the semiotic chora), she makes significant challenges to the theorisation of subjectivity and the subversion of identity. This challenge takes place on a number of fronts.

Firstly, it challenges the Freudian and Lacanian notion of the repression of drives occasioned by entry into language. Kristeva is concerned not merely with the 'successful' rational/communicative space established by the renunciation of heterogeneity, but the means by which such a space is apparently attained at all, and the constant subversion and displacement of this space by forces supposedly repressed. Focussing on rhythm, repetition, allision and displacement reinforces a notion of the subject as 'in process', rather than ideal enunciator, since it concerns

the apparent failures rather than the successes, of the struggle to maintain a coherent identity. Further, it is these 'failures' which open a space to allow for dialogue, engagement with the other and love. This does not become apparent until Kristeva's later work.

Secondly, she draws attention to a connectivity between the psychic orderings into provisional articulations and the linguistic positionings which allow participation in social practice and the symbolic. This connectivity focusses on the disruptive results in the symbolic. Identity formation based on repression is therefore destined never to be wholly successful, permitting the breakthrough of forces of otherness which, although now articulated only in the communicative sphere, nevertheless permit some initial topographical account of the psychic spacing of the body.

V The semiotic chora

The notions of the semiotic and the 'chora' in Kristeva's work present an attempt to theorise the untheorisable; a pre-discursive realm which is described in terms of space or a locus to avoid pinning it to any particular designation. We can see even in Kristeva's early work she is seeking a means of expressing an 'open' grounding of heteronomous, bodily and signifying forces from which to consider a disrupted and disruptive body. This will be developed in her later work in conjunction with maternity and in relation to theological themes. However, in her earlier work this notion is worked out in the context of psychoanalytic discourse. Therefore it is still within the context of the individual's development

and identity that these notions are elaborated and given an initial alignment with feminine or maternal symbolism.

Kristeva writes of the semiotic as a kind of primordial writing or signifying of the body, although this is not strictly an accurate description, since it is concerned with 'the body of a subject who is not yet constituted as such'.(46) Still, we can note this pre-signifying signification, a textuality of the body which is more experiential than meaningful. 'We understand the term semiotic in its Greek sense; σημεῖον = distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration.'(47) It is a pre-signifying ordering of energies which initiates the inscription and conditions for representation. Hypothesised as both the material rhythms and forces underlying the possibility of textuality, and the imprinting of of psychical energies to connect sensation to movement, it acts as a preparation for entry into language. This space is as yet undifferentiated but it cannot be described as homogeneous, shot through with 'psychical marks' and in a state of motility. Kristeva names it as 'the chora... an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases'.(48)

That this notion is positioned 'prior' to signification should not be taken to indicate a necessary chronology in time, since this realm is symbolically 'other' to temporal order as well as topographical space. Kristeva writes:

> ...the semiotic that 'precedes' symbolisation is only a theoretical presupposition justified by the need for description. It exists in practice only within the symbolic and requires the symbolic break to

> obtain the complex articulation we associate with it in musical and poetic practices...only theory can isolate (it) as preliminary.[49]

Therefore although it is given an apparently archaic and originary status, it does not constitute a reified origin divided from the subject in the symbolic. This would replicate a duality which Kristeva is concerned to resist; the terms are not equal and the notion of origin is only reconstructed in retrospect from positions already in language. She also points to the inadequacy of theoretical discourse as a means of representing such a notion; it does not quite seem to capture what she wants to say... in this sense we can see parallels with Rousseau's state of nature in the Discourse on Inequality[50] and with the fall from grace in Pascal's Pensées.[51] Both formulate a notion of origin from which we are separated, but tragically and paradoxically, it is only through separation we can sense the loss of bliss, grace, unmediated jouissance. The imperfect 'fallen' discourse is condemned to be opaque, figurative, corrupt and undecidable, and yet our only means of characterising this posited origin. This point is offered as a response to critics who firstly accuse Kristeva of a cause-and-effect relation between semiotic and symbolic, and secondly accuse her of making the repression of the mother the condition of subjectivity.[52] On the first point we may see the relation is not straightforwardly causal;

> Our discourse - all discourse - moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it. Although the chora can be designated and regulated it can never be definitely posited as a result, one can situate the chora and, if necessary lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form.[53]

On the second point, I think this corresponds to a confusion of description and prescription; that is, Kristeva is being accused of advocating the system she is in fact analysing. As she draws attention to the symbolic connection of the chora with feminine or maternal notions, she is taking up pre-figured connections which identify the notion of an origin with a primordial mother, but also with an 'absent deity'.

> '(We can read) in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which significance is constituted. Plato himself leads us to such a process when he call this receptacle or chora nourishing or maternal, not unified in an ordered whole because deity is absent from it.(54)

We can only make this connection with 'a sort of bastard reasoning', as Plato characterises it in the Timaeus, a logic which is 'prior' to names and syllables, and otherwise to the divine; going against God's law, or flouting the established patriarchal order.(55)

This subversive hint initially presents a note of optimism for feminist theory; not only is the process of signification and identity shown to be in a constant process of disruption, but the equivocal otherness is marked by symbolic association with negativity and femininity/maternity. The multiple implications of making this linkage do not become fully apparent until it is given greater attention in Kristeva's later work. For the time being we will note the dangers of activating a symbolic/metaphoric association of women with a primordial void, a space beyond meaning which, in keeping with negativity is also connoted with death. In addition, such symbolism 'turns back on itself' to re-present an Ideal Mother figure, 'outside' the social and political matrices within which women live.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FEMININE AS ETHICAL

At the beginning of Ethique de la différence sexuelle, Irigaray writes:

> For the work of sexual difference to take place, a revolution in thought and ethics is needed. We must re-interpret the whole relationship between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic...In order to live and think through this difference, we must reconsider the whole question of space and time.[1]

Irigaray links the reconsideration of these categories with the possibility of thinking through sexual difference in a more productive way. Her sceptical strategy is intended to arouse doubt as to the certainties of apparently foundational structures by questioning their neutrality, but simultaneously to evoke new potentials in the rupturing of such categories. In this chapter I will consider the attempts made by Kristeva and Irigaray to unsettle these relations in such a way that the association of the feminine with negativity is itself put into question, in order to prevent it being cancelled out. To refuse the cancellation of such a force is, for Kristeva and Irigaray, to refuse the immobilisation or incorporation of the feminine as a disruptive, but ultimately directionless force. What is required is a re-thinking of space and time, and of the body, such that other possibilities might emerge.

In the previous chapter we saw how the characterisation of the feminine as other is metaphorically aligned with heteronomy and negativity, an alignment which engenders the disruption of subjectivity from 'within'. However, to indicate that this force is not merely nihilistic, it will be necessary to consider how Kristeva and Irigaray link such a notion with the

future of sexual difference and see this rupture as ethical. The positioning of the feminine/maternal as the 'eternal irony of the community' expresses the ambivalent position that women occupy, simultaneously essential and threatening to the formulation of ethical precepts.

In the final parts of this chapter I will discuss the way that Kristeva and Irigaray examine notions of therapy, borrowed from the psychoanalytic session, to explore the ethics of sexual difference. Such a notion of therapy is intended to open up more fruitful symbolic relations, to generate 'an ethics of love and of the passions'(2), without reproducing either the dangers of essential difference or the obliteration of difference in a more general horizon. Both Kristeva and Irigaray locate an ethics of the passions in the context of an excessive experiential dimension.

Recent readings of Kristeva(3) suggest significant difficulties with her theorisation of maternity and the feminine. These difficulties concern firstly, her apparent commitment to a dissolution of metaphysical identities, the collapse of 'male' and 'female' as homogeneous entities into the process of signification, a freeing of essentialism, which echoes Lacan's pronouncement that 'Woman does not exist'(4) (in the sense of the cumbersome ideal existence which, in applying to the whole sex, fits no woman in particular). Despite the fact that some post-modern theoreticians see this as a liberating gesture, the endless dance of positionalities in a future not dominated by any particular sexual mark, it has a disturbing side. This is the loss of the specificity that feminist theory has sought

for the establishing of political identity, into a non-specific and therefore neutralised space of sexual in-difference.

In Edith Wyschogrod's book Saints and Post-modernism,(5) she echoes this concern of the loss of identificatory markings in ethical terms. She is critical of what she identifies as a strand of the 'metaphysics of nihil' in post-modern thinking. She is seeking a means of presenting a possibility of ethics in the face of, as it were, the apocalyptic tones of post-modernism, a possibility which does not reinstate categories shown to be problematic, but equally does not cede to the apparently 'pandemic character of desire'.(6) This is a legitimate concern, since it seems that the notion of the unconscious initiates an unleashing of forces which are resistant to the legislative jurisidiction of the social self as 'there can be no vantage point other than desire itself for acquiring purchase against desire'.(7) The anonymity produced in this anti-foundationalist move is antithetical to the recognition of difference and the opening of a radical kind of ethicality. However, it is not clear that Kristeva is to be so clearly conscripted into thinkers with 'pernicious consequences for ethical existence' as Wyschogrod seems to think. Wyschogrod's accusation is formulated thus:

> By adhering to the postmodern 'canons' of limitless desire and the indistinguishability of moral from literary discourse, Kristeva can neither endorse nor excoriate the racist work of Celine, to which she appeals on other grounds.(8)

For Wyschogrod, this leads to 'moral ambiguity', occasioned when the commitment to radical difference falters. In passages such as the

following, it might seem that Kristeva is suggesting a loss of discrimination, and so a loss of ethical judgement and also of sexual difference: 'No reference point in the unconscious...No present, no past, no future. No true or false either. It displaces, condenses, distributes'.(9)

But Wyschogrod, in basing her reading of Kristeva upon one text alone (Powers of Horror) fails to capture the subtleties of her later texts (eg. Tales of Love and In the beginning was Love; psychoanalysis and faith), which are, ironically enough, precisely focussed on radical readings of 'saintliness'; the conjunction of ecstasy and religious ethicality. The misreading of Kristeva is based on seeing her notion of the abject(10) as a 'black mysticism', an apocalyptic flushing out of the sacred into the despair of a secularised amoralistic world, leaving it bereft of any means of discriminating or judging. Literature seems to become the only sanctuary in this nightmare vision, and then to abort its own santity, since the flow of signification provides no place to hide. Hence for Wyschogrod, Kristeva becomes a thinker of not only subjective annihilation but also the attempted denial of the abject, as it is theorised in conjunction with the sacred, and also with the figure of the mother (this view of Kristeva is also echoed in Mark C. Taylor's book Altarity).(11) My concern is not merely to defend Kristeva, but to expand upon her complex theorisation of otherness to indicate how, in fact, she is a thinker who is precisely articulating the ethical and (post-)theological preoccupations of Wyschogrod and Taylor. In the passage immediately following the one quoted above, Kristeva writes:

> ...what the father doesn't say about the unconscious, what sign and time repress in their impulses, appears as their truth (if there is no absolute, what is truth, if not the unspoken of the spoken?) and this truth can be imagined only as a woman. A curious truth: outside time, with neither past nor future, neither true nor false; buried underground, it neither postulates nor judges. It refuses, displaces, breaks the symbolic order before it can re-establish itself.(12)

This 'curious' version of truth corresponds to Wyschogrod's own notion of post-modern ethics, the anchorage she proposes to rescue from the infinite regress of 'limitless desire'. Kristeva suggests three ways in which this curious truth may be understood: 'Jouissance, pregnancy, and marginal speech: the means by which this 'truth', cloaked and hidden by the symbolic order and its companion, time, functions through women.'(13) Here Kristeva is linking 'a vigilance, call it ethical',(14) with the figuration of the feminine and the maternal as 'other'. It is a critical and disruptive kind of ethicality, linked to a capacity to resist the fixation of subjectivity and to remain critical, but also seeking a means to express such 'otherness'.

> ...to refuse all roles, in order, on the contrary, to summon this timeless 'truth' - formless, neither true nor false, echo of our jouissance, of our madness, of our pregnancies - into the order of speech and social symbolism. But how? By listening; by recognising the unspoken in speech; by calling attention at all times to whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, disturbing the status quo.(15)

Kristeva's characterisation of this 'other' truth is heterogeneous, bodily and questioning of the status quo. It rescues an attentive and listening vigilance from the demand for an ethics of the community as consensus, but also from the uncontrollable circulation of polysemy and desire.

So we are prompted to ask: What is it that is significantly different about

Wyschogrod's exposition of heterogeneous alterity which allows it to be called ethical, in contrast with the unruly and apparently amoral forces of desire that she wishes to condemn? This is a crucial question as it lies at the heart of the distinction between the post-modern theorists of difference who are concerned to think difference in a productive and positive way, and those who maintain a critical or sceptical perspective. We might also question what is at stake in Wyschogrod's wish to keep separate the categories of moral and literary discourse, if this is one of the fundamental dualisms that post-modernist writers have already questioned, a questioning which she has already subscribed to.

Despite Kristeva's characterisation of the subject as 'an open system', she is in no way committed to the denial of sexual difference or the 'erasure' of the subject. Her project is an unsettling of the vicious dichotomies which sustain violence; which, in Lacanian terms, tear us from bliss and fatally foreclose on the possibility of reconcil iation by fundamentally splitting us in language, creating the space of desire which is lack. The division which places women symbolically on the wrong side of the divide means the totalising aspect of Lacan's theory demands sacrifice and suppression of difference. Kristeva's work is seeking to allow for the possibility of pleasure and the opportunity for dialogue.

> ...another relationship arises out of sexual difference and the impossible element it infers on both sides...A painful laboratory that entails mistakes, failures, victims. But if you want to talk about it... you find yourself once again face to face, two by two...(16)

The configuration of a notion of temporality as chronological progression and division apparently allows and guarantees communicability and the positioning of a subject in language. It also appears to present, in respect of the above, the possibility of ethicality, if ethics is seen to reside in a network of pre-distinguished social/intersubjective relations. The notion of externality which is implied in this conception of ethics is, however, what is being opened to question, since it seems to render homogeneous not only those subjects who are under discussion as moral agents, but also relations between them, and to imply a presentation of the time of the moment as communicable, with an implicit telos to this time's unfolding. As Kristeva and Irigaray suggest, the occlusion of difference in these contexts amounts to a 'forgetting' of sexual difference as well. The presentation of ethics in this external mode rests upon certain assumptions about communicability, socialisation and presentation which, while seeming to open emancipatory possibilities (since they appeal to a common sense of shared experience and the possibility of dialogue) in fact reinscribe dogmatic principles even as they seek to break from them.

In her essay 'Women's time',[17] Kristeva indicates a positioning of women in respect to a different or alternative conception of time - cyclical time (repetition) and/or monumental time (eternal). This positioning is intended to pinpoint a symbolic equation not a literal one, but one which is meant to act as a form of critique of the above 'external' notion of time. But such a positioning of women suggests an identity i) inessential to the progression of time as universal and teleological, and so to the formulation of ethical agendas, and ii) essentialised, in the figure of the maternal woman, given an ideal, whole identity, but as such seen as a

symbolic object and frozen in this role. What this sugests is that if space and time are already conceptually outlined as neutral (even though this neutrality is elided with the social and psychical significations of masculinity), there can be no such thing as 'women's time', except within a hypothetical space outlined by feminist speculations. The implications of this hypothetical space will be developed in later chapters.

Kristeva's identification of these 'alternative' modes of time is born of a quite specific analysis of cultural formations and so does not echo a victimology of women - it does not deny that women can and do accrue power in the symbolic realm, but that a deeper level of exclusion and censorship operate to recuperate any such gains. It is the models of exclusion which need to be analysed and identified to negotiate such recuperations. The establishment of such models is an historical process, an accretion of meanings which can be subject (and subjected to) immanent disruptions of their determinations.

Kristeva articulates this question for women: 'What can be our place in the symbolic contract?' Or, to put it another way, 'How can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition and then as we want to transform it?'(18)
She analyses the establishment of the social contract as a violence; demanding the sacrifice of women.(19) In this she shares the perspective of Irigaray who also characterises the present economy as a sacrificial one; what is sacrificed is a certain potential for creativity metaphorically expressed in the relations between mothers and

daughters.[20] The sacrificial order, which has hitherto driven women to be 'nostalgic, ecstatic or mad', is now the subject of feminist analysis.

> The new generation of women is showing its major social concern has become the socio-symbolic contract as a sacrificial contract...women of today are affirming...that they are forced to experience this sacrificial contract against their will'.[21]

Kristeva argues for the necessity of 'active research' on the part of women which is 'hesitant but undoubtedly dissident' to 'break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions'.[22] The nature of this 'specific discourse' will be examined shortly.

Kristeva makes explicit connections between the 'feminine' conceptions of time she outlines in contrast to 'the time of linear history', and 'mystical' notions of time in other civilisations and experiences, characterised as other to Western traditions.[23] In this respect feminine time is much more convergent upon a kind of 'space' than an order of linear clock time. This 'other' time is

> ... the problematic of space, which innumerable religions of matriarchal (re)appearance attribute to 'woman', and which Plato...designated by the aporia of the chora, matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God, and consequently defying metaphysics.[24]

This alternative notion of space/time, which corresponds to an encounter with otherness, is Kristeva's attempt to reconceptualise women's relation to the social contract in other than a sacrificial way. She argues that in order to understand such a possibility it is necessary to examine religious

discourses, not only because, as in poetic discourse, there is a moment of excess and transgressive jouissance, nor even that as part of her analysis she is impelled towards those 'mythico-religious threads that have woven our loves'(25) in order to dissect the Judaeo-Christian tradition as a patriarchal network of power. I think it is primarily a search for a counter-balancing discourse to sacrifice which will herald new and less violent relations which propels her to look again at the processes of idealisation and the means of codifying ethical possibilities. 'We thereby find ourselves in face of a religion that is no longer essentially premised on sacrifice'.(26)

Although Kristeva expresses fears that the development of a 'feminist variant' of such languages may be exposed to the same risks of 'violence' and 'terrorism' as its preceding (masculine) forms, as well as the ossification of an Ideal in the persona of a kind of Woman goddess, she also sees it as presenting a real challenge to the ordering of social relations. This is because it could occasion not only an enrichment of the relations of sexual difference, but also a 'space' which could be other enough to allow difference to be creative in generating 'aesthetic practices'. Such enriched understanding and creative practices could also stave off increasing tendencies towards uniformity and the circulation of information in increasingly technological forms. Kristeva sees the radical possibilities she outlines as a means to combat sexism as well as combatting the anthropocentric tendency which sees sexual difference as a problematic of materialism alone. If sexual difference denies such a possibility it is relocated in the impasse of the same, and will reduplicate the role of 'scapegoat victim as foundress of a society and a counter-society'(27) which is given to women. Kristeva writes:

> The fact that (this possibility) might quickly become another form of spiritualism turning its back on social problems, or else a form of repression ready to support all status quos, should not hide the radicalness of the process. This process could be summarised as an interiorisation of the founding separation of the socio-symbolic contract, as an introduction of its cutting edge into the very interior of every identity whether subjective, sexual, ideological or so forth.(28)

Kristeva is gesturing here towards an understanding the formation of the individual in respect of a notion which exceeds such a process and yet is itself in constant process. In proposing an understanding of the individual which she has attempted to free from the repressive stranglehold of totalising thinking, (which has often taken extreme measures to prevent what it sees as the anarchy of relativism), a return to the anomic individual is not necessarily implied. Instead, the singularity of disparate and diverse persons is given expression in a dimension at once fluid and responsible. It is fluid because it is dissected by heterogeneity, which opens it up to otherness, and responsible, because such otherness precedes and provokes the 'demand for a new ethics', as Kristeva writes.(29)

However, despite outlining this possibility, we are faced with more questions; is Kristeva's formulation of this notion too heavily reliant upon the narrative of psychoanalysis to allow its elaboration? Is this notion given prior to sexual difference (in which case it may be neutralised and undifferentiated once again)? If it is not prior to sexual difference then it is part of the formation of 'the divine' in the image of the human (whether this is male or female) and so may fall prey to the dangers of representational thinking, a mirror held up to the blind face of humanism. Can we negotiate this either/or question in terms which will

successfully convey its radicality in a political sphere as well?

Tales of Love offers a provocation to those who characterise post-modernist thinkers as irresponsibly celebrating the crisis of metanarratives; Kristeva agrees that this is an epoch which is in crisis, witness to the loss of amatory discourses in its abjection of the sacred and its consequential 'abolition of psychic space'. Kristeva does not restore the sacred in the name of uninterrogated humanist values, but she does identify a requirement for a language in which we can more adequately characterise sexual difference, and account for the need for idealisation and identification.

Wyschogrod's separation of aesthetic and moral discourses was based on a characterisation of the aesthetic as fundamentally irresponsible, in contrast to the 'seriousness' of moral discourse. This division cannot be upheld, since the kind of radical ethicality she is seeking cannot remain ensnared within orthodox canons of morality. The ethical codes premised on the refusal of embodied ecstasy and the censorship of aesthetic desire are merely duplicated again if Wyschogrod seeks to maintain this kind of absolute boundary.

Despite the dangers inherent in the conditions of representation, without some form of representation, this dimension of Otherness outlined by Kristeva runs the risk of being 'cut off' from the world, exiled from intruding at all. Therefore it must be constantly engaged, with the disappearing possibility of its own (non)presentation. The claim to domination over the notion of otherness and the relation from this otherness in the name of truth is also another mode of excluding the

feminine. The characterisation and means of such relations are what is at stake in a feminist critique, an awareness of the process of 'constitutional inhibition' which corresponds to the establishing of the socio-symbolic in western cultures, at the expense of 'rhythms, intonations and gestures which as yet have no significance'.(30)

> The symbolic order functions in our monotheistic West by means of a system of kinship dependent upon transmission of the father's name and a rigorous prohibition of incest, and a system of verbal communication that is increasingly logical, simple, positive, and stripped of stylistic rhythmical 'poetic' ambiguities.(31)

If this is coded only as the relations between men, there is no room for the inscription of the feminine as a relation, thereby writing out any equivalent possible representations of the mother/daughter relation. Such exclusion prompts Irigaray to 'rescue' this relation;'the least cultured space of our societies'.(32)

The 'bringing into existence of subjective relations between mothers and daughters' is, for Irigaray, a form of therapy against the dereliction of relations. She makes 'practical suggestions' as to how this could be symbolised, without specifically listing the particular forms this process would take. This would be to pre-empt the work to be done by women themselves. In addition, her sustained critique of psychoanalytic orthodoxy leads her to broaden the notion of therapy away from its exclusive domain. Her whole philosophy may be said to conduct a psychoanalysis of the bases of philosophical rationality, uncovering what is repressed in order to allow it to be spoken. Her work develops 'a cure of the cure' addressing the discipline of psychoanalysis too, as part of her strategic reconstruction of a history 'the same'.

But despite this proviso, she does discuss the specificity of an analytic situation in 'The gesture in psychoanalysis',[33] where her aim is to consider the experiential dimensions of the situation as well as the emphasis on discourse (the speaking as well as what is said, gestures and movements as well as discourse). She is at pains to resist the construal of the analyst as all-powerful, and to avoid breaching the confidentiality of the analytic situation.

Kristeva also links this understanding of otherness and the space opened by unconditional and unconditioned otherness, to a form of therapy, bringing to the fore those relations which are 'lost' or suppressed.

Initially, this seems a suspect move into what is generally conceived of as a situation of power. As John Lechte[34] makes clear, the analytic space is seen to be based on

- the divulgence and exposure of meanings most hidden even to the analysand, in the presence of an analyst who remains sovereign

- the analysand is observed, the analyst the observer; the analysand speaks, the analyst remains silent.

- the analyst is not open to question as the bearer of authority, the analysand seeks/desires approval or clarification.

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encounter with the other in a dialogic setting. If it seems that the analyst is claiming a meta-status then we must be reminded of the Lacanian insights into language and identity once again; the analyst cannot have knowledge and objective observational powers in respect of the analysand if there is no position from which to assert this. Lacan writes: 'il n'y a pas de métalangage', but, as John Lechte writes, this could turn out to be 'a final grab for mastery - hence the double-edged title of Kristeva's essay: 'Il n'y a pas de maître à langage''(35). Kristeva challenges the 'masterful' position from which Lacan could make this assertion and the way this could lead to 'a mummification of transference'.(36) Without this challenge, Kristeva asks, does analysis not 'run the risk of becoming set within the tyranny of idealisation, precisely? Of the Phallus or of the superego?'.(37) Or, if non-meaning is already inherently there in the situation, neither the analyst nor the critics can legitimately claim to 'know' what is the truth of the situation. But the loss of a transparent claim to truth would not necessarily lead to an abdication of responsibility, although perhaps a reconceptualisation of the whole notion of 'therapy'. Therapy in this respect would neither be a papering over of the cracks of identity in order to return a subject to a normative world, nor reconciliation to and affirmation of a fundamentally tragic fragmentation. This kind of therapy could become political in that it would involve an acknowledgement of the silence and non-mastery of the situation.

The analyst must be, for Kristeva, an ethical and enabling figure, whose concern is not to put back a 'proper' self, but to give the analysand a space to 'Help them... to speak and write themselves in unstable, open, undecidable spaces. A work in progress.'(38)

Irigaray also considers the ethicality of this enabling process, when she writes; 'Clearly it is not a question of teaching the subject a new code or doctrine, for instance; rather, it is a question of helping him or her to, in Heidegger's words, build his or her house of language'.(39)
Kristeva echoes this metaphor: 'Are we not concerned with building their own proper space, a 'home' for contemporary Narcissi?'(40)

But dangers lie in construing the analytic situation as the sole site of healing and construction, since it becomes a very narrow base upon which to try and build a largescale change in the conditions and possibility of relations with others. Questions as to the access and availability of therapy, cost and institutionalisation are not solved by arguing for its value.
Another danger is in collapsing the unfigured, unrepresentable love of the pre-given into the figure of the analyst. Although this gives an incarnation of unconditional love into a sensible dimension, the givenness of listening without judging ('a simple listening, lovingly absentminded...)(41), there is a risk of seeing the analyst as God. Kristeva tries to argue this is a stage in transference which allows for amatory discourse, opening and facilitating a psychic space.

> The analyst thus temporarily stands in the place of the Great Other in as much as he [sic] is the metaphorical object of idealising identification. It is in knowing this and doing it that he creates the space of transference.
> (But) the analyst must in addition let it be known...that he is a fleeting, failing or even abject subject of desire. He will then trigger within the psychic space his love has allowed to exist the tragicomedy of life drives and death drives... (42)

Kristeva indicates how her more complex theorisation of the relation to and from metaphoricity, the analyst and the pre-oedipal opens an articulation of the space of the semiotic, although she is cautious about this too (perhaps the poetic side of 'Stabat Mater' is meant to count as her own rendering of this possibility).[43] But she is clear that she sees her understanding of the Other as 'not a "pure signifier" but as the very space of metaphorical shifting; a condensation of semantic features as well as the non-representable drive heterogeneity that subtends them, goes beyond them, and slips away', as an access to more fluid possiblities than are presented by Lacan.

> ...by stressing the partiality of the 'unary feature' during idealising identification, Lacan located idealisation solely within the field of the signifier and desire; he clearly if not drastically separated it from narcissism as well as from drive heterogeneity and its archaic hold on the maternal vessel. To the contrary, by emphasizing the metaphoricity of the identifying idealisation movement we can attempt to restore to the analytic bond located there its complex dynamic...[44]

In 'Women's Time' Kristeva writes;

> I call 'religion' this phantasmic necessity on the part of speaking beings to provide themselves with a representation (animal, female, male, parental etc.) in place of what constitutes them as such...[45]

In this echo of Feuerbach, 'perfecting' of representations constitutes the fertility of future horizons.[46] Feminist theory, she goes on to say, is beginning to provide such resources. The fact that this is in danger of replicating a traditional religious attitude - unquestioning worship (this time of 'matriarchal' beliefs and godesses) - should not overshadow its radical novelty. Kristeva indicates this when she writes 'What discourse,

if not that of religion, would be able to support this adventure which surfaces as a real possibility?'(47)

In this sense, we are seeking a mode of identification which could be fulfilling rather than oppressive. However, it is clear that the kinds of 'representation' that might be occasioned do not have the backing of any kind of guarantee as to the directions they might follow, nor is it clear the extent to which they are free of the determinations of 'what constitutes them as such', other than a notion of responsibility which must bear the weight of further investigation.

Similar problems are raised in the context of Irigaray's notion of the female imaginary providing the resources for a 'feminine' genre/genus; this notion begs the question of the conditions of representation once again. Irigaray can negotiate this problem by claiming she is collecting up residual conceptions of the feminine/maternal which are already present, or as Margaret Whitford characterises it, 'scraps or debris of what might be an alternative female imaginary (and) an anticipation of a more fully deployed female imaginary which might exist in creative intercourse with the male'.(48)

In Éthique de la différence sexuelle Irigaray plays upon the notion of enveloping body/enveloped body (envelopper/enveloppe) to indicate how the closed nature of such a relation, which could stand for the relation between the sexes, is endangered by its very closure. The envelope is the identity we occupy as well as the relation demarcating identity, an activity of desire indicating an interval or spatialising in the action of enveloping or being enveloped. The process of such a relation has involved

a defining placing of woman as mother, providing a 'sense of place for man',[49] thus functioning as a limit to a sense of identity. This has also meant

> the mother woman remains the place separated from its 'own' place, a place deprived of a place of its own. She is, or ceaselessly becomes, the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it.[50]

As a means of negotiating this symbolisation as destruction, the threatening aspect of the woman who 'threatens by what she lacks, a 'proper' place', another relation to the Other has to be sought, to negotiate 'a relationship with the divine, death, the social and cosmic order' which could function more productively.

Echoing Derrida and Lavinas, she suggests we are living in an age when time must redeploy space, particularly when the subject has become 'the master of time' and 'femininity is experienced as a space that carries connotations of the depths of night (God being space and light)'.[51]

She also indicates the need for 'intervals' (or enter-vals) within the topographical envelopes of identity, spaces within space to interrupt the constitution of identity as homogenous and whole. Thus on one level the figuring of woman as mother (who also represents death, or dispersal, since she has no place,) is interrupted by the introduction of a third term for women which could function as a limit or horizon as a means to understand (their) identity. On another level the notion of interval interrupts the illusory notion of any full, exclusive or complementary consummation between the sexes, since it heralds 'self-interruption', and so a constant residue or excess to the self and in its relations.

Thus the notion of limit, defining oneself against the infinite which allows identity to take place, becomes a necessary innovation for women, to compensate for the lack of subjectivity which they have experienced. Yet the means by which identity has been achieved in the past has been precisely at the expense of a notion of woman construed as negative, silence, non-placed. Neither the infinite as a negatively feminine other nor the other as woman provide a space sufficient for women to conceptualise their own desire adequately, let alone a desire for more adequate conceptions of sexual difference. The spaces hitherto marked out for relations - ethical, sexual, divine have been ostensibly neutral, but, Irigaray suggests, must now be exposed as organised according to the masculine and hence guaranteeing its continuity upon what it (necessarily) represses - alterity, diversity and femininity.

> What poses problems in reality turns out to be justified by a logic that has already ordered reality as such. Nothing escapes the circularity of this law.(52)

But if nothing can be sought outside this logic then where and how is Irigaray's attempt to articulate her impossible otherness to be located? Her response is to focus upon a heretical notion within the Lacanian orthodoxy; the notion of a specifically feminine jouissance. Feminine pleasure in any kind of specificity is heretical in this system for a number of reasons. According to the organisation of the economy of desire the precondition for the appearance of identity is the submission of heterogeneity and multiplicity, (hence symbolically also the feminine), to the structuring of the Symbolic; that is the cultural and social meanings

of difference. Such meanings are not neutral but already aligned, in patriarchal cultures, to the masculine. Thus the feminine is not only suppressed or repressed but lies elsewhere to the circuit of symbolic meaning and linguistic conceptualisation. Any expression/conceptualisation of pleasure takes place according to the masculine, since it is this realm which characterised, described and prescribed what was to count as pleasure at all, relying on the outlawing of what it was not. to set up this definition.

If feminine pleasure is allowed to exist at all, it is, as Lacan implies in 'God and the jouissance of (The) Woman',(53) on the level of silent, excessive experiential bliss, a transport of joy glimpsed on the transfixed face of Bernini's St. Theresa, but a pleasure 'beyond the phallus', so beyond 'knowing' in any communicative way.

> Pleasure without pleasure: the shock of a remainder of "silent" body matter that shakes her, in the interstices, but of which she remains ignorant. "Saying" nothing of this pleasure, after all, thus not enjoying it.(54)

In Irigaray's figuration of 'La Mystérique',(55) the female mystics experience irradiation by the flames of the divine, the madness which 'slips away unseen from the eye of reason' into an experience of the soul's night, to be illuminated by a different blaze of light. The mystic is a 'burning glass' which refracts the loss of subjectivity in a luminous fluidity.

> Fire flares up in the inexhaustible abundance of her underground source and is matched with opposing but congruent flood which sweeps over the 'I' in an excess of excess. Yet, burning, flowing along in a wild spate

of waters, yearning for even greater abandon, the 'I' is empty still, ever more empty, opening wide in a rapture of soul.(56)

The experience of the female mystic has been validated and envied; one historical moment when 'the poorest in science were the most eloquent, the richest in revelation'.(57) It represents the hysterical mimicry of suffering and pleasure to excess - subjectivity 'undone by being overdone'.(58) This displacement and subversion at the very heart of the onto-theological is, for Irigaray, the way to a provisional articulation of language in the feminine, a feminine position to speak from.

The articulation of such a concept (feminine language) has to be undertaken with extreme care. It often appears to be akin to a mystical language of the female body; and in fact this is one aspect of Irigaray's work which has led to her being described as essentialist or biologically reductive.(59) It seems as if she is outlining a specificity to the female body which duplicates the kind of binary sexual difference she has already been concerned to put into question. Is this a return to the 'essential' woman, mother - metaphysical and ideal?

Firstly, the description of Irigaray as a feminist of difference indicates her resistance to the kind of equality premised on sameness - the suppression of otherness between men and women as well as the suppression of difference <u>within</u>. Some notion of the specificity of the sexes is politically required. But it must be a specificity which is open to social, political and cultural forces as well, to allow for change in its inscription and signification.

The experience of fluidity and the surrender of subjectivity in the tradition of the female mystics is, it must be stressed, a metaphorical and hypothetical language - the feminine body nominated as the model for this experience of otherness is already symbolic. It is an enactment of a complex fusion of meanings of difference. Irigaray is careful to write of a morphologicalunderstanding of the body, meaning the way the body is topographically and culturally understood, rather than the biological 'reality' of its anatomy. By this means she hopes to provide a non-reductive sexualisation of the space of the body.

Lacan would deny the possibility of any representation of this specificity, since it would require a polarisation of libido, and/or suggest an alternative symbolic order, almost a parallel universe, which representationally must be disallowed. Irigaray's defiance is to historicise psychoanalytic terms, to point out the way its narrative still falls prey to the culture-specific manifestation of masculine organisation. Even at the moment psychoanalytic discourse seeks to explicate psychic space, it is subject to a censorship of its own terms of reference, symbolically ordering libido around, for Freud, biological difference, for Lacan, the phallus. Irigaray mimics this narrative, duplicating and displacing it, thereby indicating the extent to which the Symbolic is not an immobile edifice, but a process of fixing and unfixing meaning. She also indicates, through her mimicry, that she is not referring to a body reductively real, but a morphological space as an intersection of crosscurrents of meanings. Such a space conveys not only the reproduction of power relations and the most clichéd symbolism of the body, but also the resistances which undermine and rework such symbolism.

So, importantly, it is not so much an uncovering of a forgotten feminine pleasure which is required, but the exposure of a framework which could outlaw its very existence in the first place, thereby creating a space of possibility. So it is not making anew, but nor is it merely repeating the same. What this amounts to in her work is, in defiance to the monological and monotheological structuring of the Symbolic, a co-operation in the attempt to develop a 'feminine genre'.

For Irigaray this defiance deserves to be called ethical in that it throws into question the fundamental identity of any neutral ethical agent, as well as the drawing up of future ethical agendas.

The double vision of a feminist perspective is to acknowledge the extent to which a site of alterity makes possible an understanding of sexual difference - the notion of a feminist ethics is made possible by a notion of what ethics might be in the first place - but the refusal of neutrality intervenes to throw back questions as to the production and representation of that site. The nature of the subject is thrown into question, expressive and experiential and yet not epistemologically ordering in the same way. Similarly, notions of space and time are strategically reconceived in terms of equations with the 'otherness' of the feminine/maternal.

CHAPTER FOUR: PHENOMENOLOGY AND EMBODIMENT

If the codification of the erotic, desire and physicality is equated with that which is dangerous to ethicality, which must be suppressed or excluded, (and by extension given a feminine symbolism), then it is also accorded a powerful negative aspect. As Plato, Kant and Descartes(1) exemplify, in the increasingly intensified attempts to keep contingency and the vicissitudes of bodily experience under control, in the interests of producing ethical certainties, the suppressed force becomes more difficult to contain. Attempts to establish an ethical principle which is free of the contingencies of situated existence, but which can then be reapplied back into the space of such experience in order to judge it, already finds what it has attempted to contain as guilty in advance.

If ethics is constructed as the enemy of desire and the erotic, then it becomes the shape of repression, setting up for itself the very grounds and possibility of transgression of its most central precepts, in its own construction. Therefore, it is pre-disposed to failure as an ethical absolute, or else it is driven into increasingly violent efforts to maintain the boundaries of its sanctity.

But rather than tentatively reintroducing physicality and contingency back into the same framework of ethics, Kristeva and Irigaray take the risk of placing embodiment at the centre of this theorisation, risking the erosion of absolute ethical principles in order to emphasize sexual difference. So far, their theorisation has involved using psychoanalytic theories of sexual identity and the symbolic representation of the feminine. This

version of embodiment should be understood as stressing difference and divergence, implicitly calling more orthodox ethical theories into question. Instead of seeing identity as essence or essentialism, they theorise the subject as a complex site of desires and determinations. Such an understanding resists the prioritising of rationality as the capacity for ethical action. It also suggests a way of negotiating the splits between autonomy/heteronomy, masculine/feminine, flesh and spirit, the carnal and the divine, divisions which are detrimental to women, placed as they are on the 'wrong' side of the divisions. Such divisions characterise the sacrificial nature of the socio-symbolic order. The ethics which Kristeva and Irigaray suggest encompasses a critique of such determinations and attempts to think 'otherwise' to this conceptual schema. The ethics they propose will be an ethics of love or of the passions, characterised by Irigaray as 'carnal ethics'.

In order to place such theories more certainly in the context of the discipline of philosophy, it is now my intention to show the connections between this feminist perspective and the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas.(2) The purpose of this connection is to show the convergence of a re-thinking of embodied existence and its possibilities for ethical theory.

Both phenomenology (as it is interpreted by Merleau-Ponty and Levinas) and psychoanalytic theory concern themselves with an intentional analysis of desire, which is to say both recognise sexuality and the active constitution of a life world to be mutually implicated.

What both Merleau-Ponty and Levinas bring to the fore in the intentional relation between consciousness and objects or others in the world in Husserlian phenomenology[3] is the implied eroticisation of this movement of desire. If the phenomenological possibility of describing lived experience in various regional ontologies is pursued, we may develop a constant recollection of the situated and sexualised signification of existence. But further, this possibility of re-description is not a reductive stabilisation of the erotic into a physicalist analysis, or a prelude to a purified transcendental consciousness, but rather presents the various meanings of the lived body as a constantly regenerative possibility. Such meanings may be activated in different ways but are kept open as a process of signification. Intentionality as desire is dynamic, refusing the closure of objectification and resisting the fixture of the other as object.

In addition, the impingement of the erotic acts as an interruption to pure consciousness and self-presence. The erotic insists on a return to the situated and contingent, the carnal dimension.

In The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,[4] Lacan makes several references to the impact of Merleau-Ponty's post humously published manuscript, The Visible and the Invisible[5] on his own thinking. This work is significant in drawing Lacan's attention more specifically to the topology of the body, the boundaries of 'inner and outer' and the modes of understanding this spatiality as it is experienced in the process of existence. Such a shift is a development of his implicit and explicit criticisms of the dominance of the visual in psychoanalysis. Lacan had already developed this critique in response to Freud, in his shift to the

signifying process which allowed the recognition of sexual difference to occur. The refusal of this 'visibility' is accompanied by a refusal of an underlying 'biological' account of drives. Lacan suggests instead that meanings are fundamentally obscured by the ambiguities of the signifying process, thereby denying a closure of the body as object of desire and as site of meanings. This is also a resistance to a causal account of meaning.

Lacan finds in Merleau-Ponty a modification of the phenomenological framework which concurs with his own 'freeing' of desire from these determinations, but which does not relinquish the attention given to the form and topologies of the sexualised body and intersubjective space.

> ...of course, I have my ontology - why not- like everyone else, however naive or elaborate it may be. But certainly, what I try to outline in my discourse - which, although it interprets that of Freud, is nevertheless centred essentially on the particularity of the experience it describes - makes no claim to cover the whole of that experience...the maintenance of this aspect of Freudianism, which is often described as naturalism, seems to be indispensable, for it is one of the few attempts, if not the only one, to embody psychical reality without substantifying it.(6)

This 'embodiment of psychical reality without substantifying it', is then comparable to Merleau-Ponty's revaluation of form for Lacan. '(It) brings us back, then to the regulation of form, which is governed, not only by the subject's eye, but by his expectations, his movement, his muscular and visceral emotion - in short, his constitutive presence, directed in what is called his total intentionality'.(7)

But intentionality is already intersected by the enigmatic conditions of perception, the'strange contingency'(8) which for Lacan is the lack or

split manifest at the heart of the scopophilic field. This disruptive effect maintains a disturbance in the signification of otherness as well as in the structure of perception.

Phenomenology provides resources for a re-description of the lived experience of the body, a means of examining not only the erotic structures and significations of situated existence, but, more specifically for this study, the implications of sexual difference in this context. What are the conditions under which an other becomes constituted not only as an object of erotic fixation through the specular and optical perception, but is recognised as sexually differing? Is it possible that such recognition could be ethical? Is such recognition automatically bound by the structures of perception, an epistemological conquest of the other? Although this question is taken up in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, this chapter will explore the initial implications of sexual difference in this context.

A 'phenomenology of carnality'(9) appears in both Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, but it is not the possibility of mastery of the visible/erotic realm which interests the two thinkers, but the way that such carnality interrupts and undoes any claim to mastery, in its equivocation. Merleau-Ponty's concern is to re-explore the familiar yet mysterious enigma of reflection and intuition, if possible, in a way that does not prejudge the issues. Thus his phenomenology attempts to think in a way which can negotiate the categories of understanding and perception that have been philosophically established, so lending new resources to the philosophical project. Like Sartre, he is still concerned with the

vicissitudes of the lived experience of the individual, but his concern with carnal embodiment as a disruptive force and his increasing disaffection with the limitations of phenomenology mark out his work as having significant implications in a feminist context. As Simone de Beauvoir recognises in quoting Merleau- Ponty in The Second Sex:

1. The lived body is a field of possibilities and not merely a basis for transcendence which will be superseded in the process.

2. The determinations of the visual metaphor can be shown to have historical assumptions underlying them which a) undermine ontological claims for their supreme validity; and b) raise questions about the sexualised nature of bodies and the way in which they are perceived.

De Beauvoir quotes from The Phenomenology of Perception where Merleau-Ponty writes: 'So I am my body, in so far, at least, as my experience goes, and conversely my body is like a life model, or like a preliminary sketch, for my total being'.(10) In the context of de Beauvoir's project, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the ambiguity of existence: to be embodied, but in such a way that embodiment is constantly being revised or reworked.

Merleau-Ponty challenges the basing of the phenomenological method in perception and intentionality by questioning the presentation of the visible to consciousness; objects are not presented as scientific and/or empirical data, nor is the observer in a privileged role as interpreter. Instead, he suggests meaning emerges in an 'ambiguous corporeal knot'.(11) In this way the meanings of the body are not wholly free, in that we

inherit certain sets of historically constituted meanings, but these do not bind us absolutely as they are available for re-interpretation. We are not wholly determined by the material body, nor by cultural stereotypes.

In The Visible and the Invisible we can begin to see the sketched implications for this reading of phenomenology in the context of intersubjective relations. The subject/object distinction may be retained, but it is traversed in a deeper, 'hypercritical' fashion, with morphological, dimensional and graphical axes, across the lived experience of the body. Rather than coming to rest on a side of any divide, Merleau-Ponty is acknowledging distinctions and differences, but attempting to develop the conceptual fluidity with which to unsettle them.

> If we could rediscover within the exercise of seeing and speaking some of the living references that assign them such a destiny in a language, perhaps they would teach us how to form our new instruments, and first of all to understand our research, our interrogation, themselves.[12]

In his attempt to return to the fundamentals of philosophical methodology, he problematises the visible and the seer by suggesting a world in which vision is intersected by the constant refusal of horizons receding into obscurity, where the possibility of recognition is clouded in a field of uncertainty. In this way he puts into question a Kantian understanding of the organising force of the categories - no longer prioritised as the crucible of sense data, the seer does not construct or constitute the world of phenomena in recollection, but is impinged upon by depths of what Merleau-Ponty calls 'wild being'. This reassessment does not, however, lead to a position of negativity for the seer, as in Sartre,which would be

to accord plenitude to the objects of perception (the distinction between the for-itself and the in-itself). Merleau-Ponty argues we cannot have access to this plenitude either - phenomena are obscured from us, dissected by 'the invisible' which exceeds our every attempt to cognise them. This is what places the seer in the world, not above it or in a relation of absolute negation.

This reconceptualising of space is matched by that of time - he negotiates any essential immediacy of the experiential moment by indicating this moment too is invaded and intersected. 'What is present harbours an immense latent content of the past, the future and the elsewhere, which it announces and which it conceals'.(13)

As Levinas comments on Merleau-Ponty:

> As Merleau-Ponty has shown, the I that constitutes the world comes up against a sphere in which it is by its very flesh implicated; it is implicated in what it would otherwise have constituted and is so implicated in the world. But it is present in the world as it is present in its own body, an intimate incarnation which no longer purely and simply displays the exteriority of an object.(14)

In situating existence in relations of equivocation, Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of the body as 'a corporeal knot of being'.(15) The articulation of this experience will, he hopes, negotiate a series of dichotomies; bodily/mental, inner/outer and presence/absence. The world is lived as this intertwining, the chiasm is the figure of the DNA structure which separates differences at the same time as interrelating them, the whole being maintained dynamically.

So despite the fact that most of Merleau-Ponty's work is concerned with

developing an ontology, he moves away from notions of otherness caught in the solipsistic domain of subjectivity, and away from the standpoint of a rational, selfknowing subject. He also moves from characterising otherness simply in terms of epistemological adequacy; where previously the other could be characterised as a problem of presentation and access to an other's interior, Merleau-Ponty places the other in a situated and embodied domain, which includes the aesthetic, moral and religious practices bearing on that domain.

The body is no longer understood as mere matter in a material world, but rather a matrix of expressive gestures, sexuality and other significant meanings. The body is seen as a site of expressivity which can engender more significations through variations of posture, position and meaning. In this sense, as Merleau-Ponty writes, 'it is open and incarnate expression'.(16)

The possibilities of this 'incarnate expression' are characterised by Merleau-Ponty as 'the flesh'; a dimensional field or space', 'an element, general thing', 'an incarnate principle of a style of being'.(17) Merleau-Ponty thus gives an account of the body as open yet corporeal sensibility, an account of embodiment which strives to maintain the distinctiveness of an existent, but prevents it being resolved into a duality by stressing fluidity and depth - an adhesion across divisions according to the general element of the flesh. He illustrates this by the example of two hands.

> ...when my right hand touches my left hand...the touching subject passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things.(18)

This relation is one which Merleau-Ponty further characterises as 'reversibility',[19] a criss-crossing which is the interrelation of two as unfamiliar, even as their relation of connection is being articulated. The process by which such a relation is articulated is a signification of bodily space. There is 'already' a language of the body which is a mode of signification, this time of movements and gestures, as well as speech and writing. But this is meaning understood as on the borders of sense, those which emerge and fade away, which include silence, absence and shadow, the form, touch and scent of a body. This is a deepening of the dimensions of meaning, giving it an opaque and uncertain aspect.[20]

The signification of the body does not point to an underlying biological body though, upon which signification is imposed or elaborated. Rather, Merleau-Ponty (and also Levinas) suggest that the body emerges through and with the possibilities of signification.[21]

Two points can be noted from this suggestion.

1. Meaning is not seen as a derivative and secondary representation of experience, but arising simultaneously in the nexus of body and language.

2. The transmission and exchange of meanings, including those of the body, take place in an intersubjective realm.

The signification of the body is seen as a textured and dimensional range of depths and possible styles, which can be dramatised and enacted in many

different possible ways. For Merleau-Ponty this is made possible by the historically sedimented discourses of the body. The previous meanings which have already been established in the context of the body will shape to a certain extent the emergent sense of the lived body. Experience is then 'a sort of archeology structured by a language already spoken'.(22) The pre-established ranges of experiences and styles we inherit allow such meanings to be articulated, but also allow them to be re-worked. Merleau-Ponty writes; 'Sedimentations of language weave past and future and my actual words are rooted in the already said'. The task is then '...to restore a power to signify, a birth of meaning or "wild meaning", an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language'.(23)

However, certain problems arise in articulating relations in terms of 'reversibility'. This notion is in danger of repeating a certain kind of duality or symmetry implied in reversal. It appears to indicate a balance or dialectic of two terms, which is reinforced by Merleau-Ponty's characterisation of this move as two hands touching each other, two maps, two halves, two leaves of being.(24) In The Visible and the Invisible, reversibility is a development of the relations between subject and object in The Phenomenology of Perception, looking at its consequences for ontology, and seeking to establish the connectivity as well as the divergence of seer and the visible. Reversibility in this context elaborates the uncertainty inherent in the relation, allowing both differentiation and divergence; the separation of the seer from the other's body, but also the means by which they fuse. Merleau-Ponty expands his notion of the flesh as fundamentally ambiguous; the self is already divided

in being in language, in the world and in history because it inherits certain conceptions from elsewhere. It is marked by non-coincidence; even the two hands are figuring otherness when they touch each other as both mastery and passivity, toucher and touched.

The first problem concerns the extent to which Merleau-Ponty is still in the sway of a predominantly visual mode of perception as explicated within phenomenology. He evidently distanced his work from that of Husserl but remains committed to the framework of perception - in the sense that he prioritises the body as fundamental in his theory perhaps this commitment is understandable. But it also raises questions about 'the limits of phenomenology' too; how far is this framework able to provide the kind of radicality of otherness which can rupture the structures of seeing, without splitting apart itself?
As a philosophical framing, the dominance of the visual mode is not only a route back to, if not attempts at mastery and control of the visible through a totalising move of perception, then to a connectivity established in the anonymity of equal symmetries of vision.

The second issue concerns the extent to which reversibility is a relation which is equivalent when operating to and from objects and to and from other persons. Is the enigma of otherness just an extension from the ambiguity of objects and their dimensions of alterity, or do other persons present a wholly different kind of ambiguity? Merleau-Ponty gestures towards the problem, but it seems in danger of being swallowed up by the 'intercorporeal' which gives a sense of a shared comprehension subtended in the 'primordial property which belongs to the flesh,...being an individual,

being also a dimension and a universal'.(25) If otherness is contained in this horizon, it seems to allow a levelling of difference into universality and the anonymity of 'wild being', a reciprocal relation when it is situated in the realm of intersubjectivity.

Levinas' two essays on Merleau-Ponty, 'Intersubjectivity' and 'Sensibility',(26) both follow a similar pattern; they outline with the text the moments of agreement before broaching the fundamental divergences of the two thinkers. Levinas sees Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of otherness as still based in knowledge, albeit an unconventional conception of otherness which fights off a thematisation of the other. But for Levinas Merleau-Ponty sustains a positive connection with the 'knowability' of the other in connecting him or her to a shared horizon of being. But Levinas begins by noting that Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment does present a challenge to the domination of consciousness, since the flesh is not a presentation of the body anterior to consciousness, but the refusal of this ordering of knowledge and consciousness. The notion that a transcendental reduction can become 'purely' theoretical occludes the irreducibility of flesh as material and yet simultaneously signifying. Levinas writes:

> Consciousness is in a situation of having already called upon what it is only supposed to constitute. This is a curious anachronism! This anachronism is precisely incarnation, in which the belonging of spirit to flesh, which, as body, it constitutes, is not reducible to the noetic-noematic correlation, to the purely theoretical.(27)

For both Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, the irreducibility of this 'older' synthesis, the 'original incarnation of thought', the flesh, is a mode of

experience in situ and never wholly intentional. Instead it is movement, expressive, a sensibility. Levinas describes this as Merleau-Ponty's uncovering of the 'unthought' (impensé) in Husserl's thought, the point where 'the felt' is also 'a feeling'.(28) Such a mode of experience is not then manifest as a merely sensate formulation of experience in congress with sensed objects in the world. Rather, the carnal is equivocal and uncertain - the 'double touching' which accounts for a certain openness to the phenomena of touching while being touched.

But, as Levinas points out, this move also corresponds to anti-humanist thinking which manifests a certain indifference to 'the drama of persons' (and hence for him a erasure of the possibility of ethics).(29) In the flight from the human as centring subject, the danger is a fall into anonymity. This is particularly the case when Merleau-Ponty locates the emergence of meaning in an intersubjective realm where the other and subjectivity surface in 'one single intercorporeality'.(30)

So despite theorising a 'pre-theoretical' realm which supplies a challenge to the ego of intentionality, this realm is then subsumed into the notion of a community of shared, intersubjective relations, a community in some agreement about the dimensions of 'feeling' and 'felt'. Such a notion allows Merleau-Ponty to keep a certain historical dimension to his theory (the body is 'an historical idea'),(31) but in so doing he joins back up with the problems of historical analysis and 'mutual knowledge' in the domain of sociality. For Levinas, this sharing of intercorporeality leads Merleau-Ponty back to a constituting of the other through knowledge, even if it is a 'deficient knowledge'.(32) Levinas proposes his own account of otherness as radical separation, gesturing to an otherness more

'primordial' than a hypothetical intercorporeality. It is this otherness which provides the very precondition for ethicality for Levinas.

> It is a possibility that does not borrow its excellence from the dignity of the One, the sociality of which may already seem compromised in multiplicity, but a possibility that is rather like a completely new modality that certifies, in and by the human, its own specific goodness. In its excellence, which is probably that of love, it is no longer simply the laws of being and of being's unity that rule. The spirituality of the social signifies precisely an 'otherwise than being'.(33)

So for Levinas, an entirely different modality is suggested by the meeting with an other, which cannot be subsumed under a more general category, whether this is 'being' or 'the flesh'. This modality of meaning allows Levinas to say there is something irreducible about the difference of others, about the proximity of the neighbour, and that such irreducibility is ethical in and of itself. This ethicality is announced in the sensate experience for Levinas, not antecedently imposed upon it.

> The handshake is not simply the notification of agreement, but prior to that notification the extraordinary event itself of peace, just as the caress, awakening to the touch, is already affection not information about the sentiment.(34)

The receptivity Levinas entwines with this notion of sensibility indicates this is not an 'intercorporeal' realm of exchange, but an asymmetrical relation, which, in making the self passive, disallows the kind of mutual knowledge Levinas finds as a supposition in Merleau Ponty. While affectivity is ambiguously situated in and through contact for Levinas, it

is cut across by force of otherness. In this way, he thinks a more radical and hence more ethical notion of the other is broached.

> Should we say a waiting for God in this anticipatory feeling of the absolutely other? Not at first or immediately a call for help, but a pathway leading to the other, leading to the human. In the touch itself, the possibility of a helping hand. Or the possibility of the caress, the kiss, the erotic.(39)

Levinas is arguing for a 'prior' responsibility which arises in the context of irreducible difference. He argues this because he sees certain dangers in the duality of the subject/object division, the model of perception as visibility, and the universal aspect of the flesh as a 'general element'. Levinas argues Merleau Ponty is unable to articulate a theory of ethics because he remains committed to perception and to the horizon of history - that the flesh leads back to the embodied historical body which constrains it in a dialectic of reciprocity. For Levinas, this commitment fails to break with the thinking of being as neutral.

Instead, Levinas seeks a mode of otherness which could fracture this relation, which could have a more profoundly disturbing effect. He indicates the need in Merleau-Ponty's work for a notion of 'the third', a force which could fracture the dualisms and totalising moves threatening the borders of his work. The danger of relativism in Merleau-Ponty is for Levinas a threat to ethicality. Levinas points to a mode of otherness which would have the power even to disturb the limits of historical analysis and its totalising process. However, in later chapters it will be necessary to question whether this means that Levinas seeks a mode of revelation which 'prejudges' the way in which phenomenological

interpretations of the body might be fulfilled. If Levinas is unwilling to relinquish this process to the vicissitudes of history, does his thought deny the possibilities which a feminist perspective might wish to raise? Is there a way to articulate a feminist perspective in the light of Levinas' thought?

The resources of phenomenology have been utilised by feminist theorists in the past and within recent Anglo-American feminist writing; most notably to argue for the experiential status of the body and the embodied nature of existence, as we have seen in the work of Simone de Beauvoir.(36) The perception of the body's dimensions and topography are seen to have implications for the structuring of experience, which should be taken into account in assessing that experience. There are two main implications for feminist thought. Firstly, sexuality is intertwined and activated as a dimension of one's existence. From a feminist perspective, the experience of the body becomes a field of possibilities rather than a fixed sexual category, and therefore (hypothetically) allows for the reconstruction of identities along less rigid lines. Secondly, it makes it possible to argue for the validity of women's experience in the context of such possibilities.

However, phenomenology's preoccupation with the visual and the visible in notions such as intentionality, description and categories of experience mean it is destined to work dangerously with the replication of certain philosophical moves identified as problematic by feminist theory. Even the re-exploration of the relations of consciousness and the world of experience may unwittingly fall into aligning the perspective of the seer with the masculine and the visible world of 'objects' and 'things' with the

feminine.

A feminist appropriation of phenomenology may duplicate the categories of subject/object in this context, this time arging that women should have access to the role of 'observer' too. This reproduction of the dominant imagery of specularity/speculation, the reflexive metaphors of mirrors and light which have shaped certain philosophical enquiries, may either leave certain essentialist notions of subjectivity uninterrogated, or fail to explain how the conditions which have positioned woman as other are to addressed, such that any projected change in the conditions of representation could take place.

In two feminist essays on Merleau-Ponty included in the anthology The Thinking Muse[37] for example, certain problems for a feminist perspective in the context of phenomenology become apparent.

Iris Marion Young's essay 'Throwing Like a Girl; a phenomenology of feminine body comportment, motility and spatiality' is based on the perceived difference 'between "masculine" and "feminine" comportment and movement'.[38] She argues that if women seem less 'open' in their movements it is due to their historical situatedness which inhibits them from utilising bodily space to its full potential. The extent to which a "feminine" motility corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's ambivalent characterisation of bodily consciousness, 'inhibited intentionality' and 'discontinuous unity with its surroundings'[39] is noted. However, she seems to be arguing for a positive validation of feminine motility in its own right without questioning her categories of 'openness', the extent to which observation of difference is a reliable methodological approach in itself, and she seems to assume we might have an unmediated and true

perception of bodily consciousness, direct access to motility and comportment. Thus she reinforces the notion of sexual difference as visibly perceived, and different characteristics of the sexes as empirically observable. In assuming we have direct access to perceptions of consciousness about the body, she implies an essentialist notion of subjectivity.

Judith Butler's essay 'Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description, a feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception' is more sophisticated on the question of identity. She argues that all sexuality is socially/historically constructed, a result of certain sedimented forms of difference which are both conditioned into and appropriated by an individual. Thus she agrees with Merleau-Ponty in The Phenomenology of Perception when he writes that 'the body is an historical idea' and that sexuality is enacted in and through existence. She believes that existence is a process, and the extent to which this process can be intervened upon depends upon one manipulating and parodying the inheritance of received notions of sexuality, and so opening up the rigid categories of difference into a multiplicity of differences and positions. Hence she takes up the notions of intentionality and motility to stress the constant regeneration and renegotiation of given terms, playing at the margins of what is coded as natural to produce creative variations. She is critical of Merleau-Ponty for reduplicating the determination of woman as other.
But again, there is an implication that a rational and self-conscious subject can knowingly manipulate cultural constructions. She does not accede to any notion of the unconscious in ideological constructions; but, as I have argued, it is not clear to what extent we have unmediated access

to the forms of cultural symbolism encountered. Further, how can we judge objectively which culturally symbolic forms are restrictive and which liberating, if ideology has such a determining effect on our perception as to throw into doubt this objectivity? Finally, her position seems to be a form of political individualism since all negotiation takes place on an individual and relativistic level, with no attempt to generalise different forms of renegotiation, and yet she seems to have an implicit feminist programme which rests on women 'recognising' open forms of sexual symbolism as being preferable to more stereotypical ones.

So far, we have seen that some of the significance of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas' work for a feminist perspective in philosophy lies in the importance attached to sexuality and the body, topics which, as Sartre agreed, had been neglected philosophically. The introduction of the sexual dimensions of bodily existence into the philosophical arena is the beginning of questions of sexual difference taken up by feminist theory. As this work maps on to contemporary philosophical enquiries regarding ways of theorising otherness which are other than colonising or intentionally constituting, it may provide a significant opening of the thinking of difference. In the next two chapters, I will examine the work of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas concerning the phenomenology of the body in more detail, to see if these possibilities may be realised. This examination will be conducted in the context of Irigaray's reading of phenomenology for feminist philosophy.

CHAPTER FIVE: 'THE INVISIBLE OF THE FLESH': PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE FEMININE

In the previous chapter I outlined some of the implications of the phenomenological situating of lived experience in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. Embodiment is the key issue which will now be pursued in more detail, in the light of the erotic dimension included in the structures of perception and experience. The re-working of the subject/object relation in Levinas and Merleau-Ponty has opened possibilities for reconceptualising topologies of the body and allowing differences to be recognised. However, certain questions remain for the feminist perspective I am developing in this study. To what extent does the phenomenological framework replicate the structures it is supposed to unsettle? Is the feminist re-thinking of sexual difference possible in this context?

This chapter will examine Irigaray's detailed reading of Merleau-Ponty's essay in The Visible and the Invisible, 'The Intertwining - the Chiasm'. By focussing on this encounter, some of the positive implications of phenomenology for feminist theory will emerge, as well as critical points of departure.

Merleau-Ponty's essay begins as follows:

> If it is true that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudges what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments reflection and intuition had provided themselves and install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been "worked over", that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both "subject" and "object", both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy resources to redefine them.[1]

Opening her reading of this piece in Éthique de la différence sexuelle with this quote, Irigaray comments;

> My reading and interpretation of the history of philosophy accords with that of Merleau-Ponty. It is necessary to return to a pre-discursive, experiential moment; everything recaptured, all the categories of apprehension of things, of the world, and of the subject/object division, all recaptured and arrested at "a mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity"...This operation is absolutely necessary for making the feminine-maternal appear in language.(2)

As in Derrida's work, Irigaray's method is to work sympathetically with a text in order to tease out some of the hidden implications of the text. This is indicated in the title of her piece, where 'The invisible of the flesh' refers to her main criticisms of Merleau-Ponty. She will argue there is ultimately an 'invisible' sublimation of the flesh to the visual and to signification at the end of his piece, at the expense of the feminine. The feminine becomes the invisible which 'supports' the seer in the world of phenomena. Irigaray wants women to be allowed to be the seer too, and not just positioned in the realm of the visible. But this will involve an opening, interruption or 'interval' in the understanding of such dualities. It is not enough to argue for the sexuate difference of seers, but also for a re-assessment of the whole notion of division and difference itself. And it is this notion, Irigaray argues, which is not broached sufficiently in Merleau-Ponty's essay.

> There is a certain elaboration of the carnal. But always in solipsistic relation with the maternal. There is no trace of the carnal idea of the other woman, nor the sublimation of the flesh with the other.
>
> The phenomenology of the flesh which tempts Merleau-Ponty is without question(s); without space or interval of free questioning between two. Without other or Other, keeping the world open. Without genesis,

without grace. Man become god, working and playing with the world until it is worn down? (3)

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty will provide us with a means to approach questions of ethics and sexual difference but also indicate important issues in the consideration of otherness which need to be examined in further detail.

We can divide Irigaray's concerns in her essay into four areas, although they are thematically interwoven in the text.

1. What allows the visible/invisible distinction to take place? A certain 'maternal/feminine' fluidity seems to underlie these distinctions, which is suppressed as an 'unconscious', although it can be identified through its workings. However, there is a danger in celebrating this notion too, as it corresponds to the equation of maternal/feminine = Nature.

2. Is touch a strategic way of undermining the dominance of the visual paradigm? As part of rethinking the divisions and distinctions of the perceptual framework, Irigaray suggests that touch could be employed to question specular obsessions.(4)

3. Irigaray considers the association of the divine with the invisible. If the divine is characterised as invisible, it becomes entrapped in the dichotomy of visible/invisible. As part of the reconsidering of such divisions, could the divine be associated with touch as a radical conception of the divine, which will give access to a mode of

representation for the feminine, a 'divine' for women as well as fracturing the divide of spirit/flesh (transcendent/carnal)?[5]

4. Irigaray also considers the relation of the networks of signification in the context of the above themes. This question is crucial if a feminist re-working of the philosophical framework is to take place. If the socio-symbolic system has already invested divisions, objects and experience with prior meanings, to what extent is any intervention possible?[6]

In the first instance, Irigaray is reading Merleau-Ponty strategically as part of that philosophical tradition which does not - cannot - acknowledge the feminine/maternal as its hidden assumption. Perhaps what makes the visible possible at all is that 'invisible of the invisible', the 'intimate pre-natal life' of fluidity, coded as the space beyond the visible and the speakable, the mother who must be unspoken and yet provides the grounding for a masculine subjectivity?[7] Here also we can note certain correspondences with Kristeva's semiotic maternal heterogeneity, only discernible through its effects. Irigaray indicates that the extreme proximity of the intertwining of mother/child appears to be superseded in Merleau-Ponty by the exteriorising of objects of attention, as they are made distant and unfamiliar. The movement of exteriorisation is necessary for some form of recognition to take place. Although Merleau-Ponty problematises this relation, Irigaray argues he is still bound by this structure.

> If it was not a question of the visible, it would be possible to think that Merleau-Ponty was making an allusion to the intra-uterine life. He employs "images" of the sea and the sand (la mer et la plage). Of immersion and emergence? And he speaks of the risk of the disappearance of seeing and the visible.(8)

However, the counter objection to Irigaray's criticism is the danger of reassigning women an equivocal relation with the natural realm, the 'invisible' of culture. If women become wholly other, they cannot see for themselves. 'If the mother, or the woman, only has a perspective on the world from the maternal function, she sees nothing. Apart from that zero of the infant's nocturnal sojourn?'.(9) So part of Irigaray's project will be to bring forth the possibility of the maternal/feminine from its 'unspeakable' association with nature. In revaluing this 'pre-discursive, experiential moment', the possibility of women speaking from their own symbolism might appear, 'making the feminine/maternal appear in language'. In other words, if women could work from a genre (genus/gender) of their own, they might negotiate being positioned as other in the visible realm against the masculine seer on the side of culture.(10)

In the second concern, Irigaray takes up some of the possibilities suggested by Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh, raising the possibility that touch could be a 'prior' experiential moment to seeing, and therefore act as a critical 'turning back' upon the dominant imagery of Western philosophy. Touch becomes that which is 'too close for discrimination, distanciation, mastery', suggesting the potential for a 'carnal ethics'. As an apparent 'supplement' to sight, touch may seem secondary - do we need to see what we touch before we can fully recognise it? Again, Irigaray evokes the symbolically feminine proximity of the intra-uterine touch to

question this notion. She agrees with Merleau-Ponty that the 'double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and the tangible in the visible'[11] interrupts the scopophilic gaze.

Merleau-Ponty writes of the strangeness of one's hand touching the other hand in the act of touching, and compares it to two halves of an orange, or the criss-crossing of two maps.

> ...when my right hand touches my left hand when it is palpating the things, where the 'touching subject' passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things.[12]

The beginnings of an interrelationship of two which yet preserves their unfamiliarity articulates a different understanding of this interrelationship. It is both an adherence to, but also a loss of mastery over, that which is constituted as other. However, as Irigaray points out, Merleau-Ponty falls back into a dualistic notion of inner and outer which, as it makes one commensurate with the other, fails to interrupt itself. Curiously, he refers to the <u>two lips</u> of the body, as its inner sense and its outer openness.

> The body unites us directly with things through its own ontogenesis; by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two lips; the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open.[13]

In this context Irigaray refers to her own notion of 'auto-affection of the two lips',[14] silently and intimately together. For her, the two lips refer to a specificity of the symbolically feminine which precisely unsettles this distinction of inner and outer, and refers symbolically to the intervals, spacings and divisions of the 'inner' self. Morphologically

'neither one nor the other' (and undecidable too, if this notion of the lips refers to speaking or sexuality), the two lips provide a way of giving women an articulating 'identity' of their own (in touch with themselves constantly).

But paradoxically, the fusion of one to the other, an inability to separate and distinguish differences, is also highlighted by this notion. In relation to Merleau-Ponty, this criticism concerns what Irigaray calls his 'animism', the dispersal of the seer into the realm of the visible, which threatens to collapse and (con)fuse differences into the anonymity of matter.(15) It will be important to allow space and interruption to prevent this fusion, 'bathing in the amniotic fluid' of enjoyment which inhibits a more ethical recognition of the other. In fact, Irigaray also links this kind of fusion to a mirroring of the same, a circularity of mirrors which must be broken into in order to give the mother back a mirroring of her own, to cut the cord which keeps the maternal in the natural and so denies her any possibility of transcendence and becoming divine.(16)

> If the child only sees itself in the mirror, how can it differentiate from its mother? He [the child or Jacques Lacan?] risks redoubling, creating the (con)fusion with the mother in birth and the mother in that other world.
>
> If there is no cutting of the cord and the osmotic exchanges of the maternal world and its substitutes, how can the sublimation of the flesh take place?(17)

Irigaray has referred to Merleau-Ponty's reliance on a distinction between seer and visible as a dangerous maintaining of dualisms, and now she seems to be critical of the dispersal and loss of such distinctions into the

'leaves of being' which constitute the phenomenal world.[18] We can see the ambiguity of her position is in fact already present in Merleau-Ponty's work, but in her reading these ambiguities are situated and questioned in a particular feminist context.[19]

As Margaret Whitford points out, separation and spacing is a necessary process, for Irigaray, in forging a relation to space-time and forging a genre for women of their own. Auto-affection provides a means of articulating a specificity of feminine identity, but it is in danger of closing upon itself unless it is interrupted by a horizon of otherness beyond this particularity. This horizon must be sufficiently other to maintain a space of openness, 'fertility' (in the sense of creativity) and prevent the sterility of 'paralysis' which inhibits. Irigaray characterises this horizon as the divine or the infinite which is unclosed and uncompleted (in-fini).[20]

This brings us to the third aspect of Irigaray's essay; the connection of touch/carnality and the divine. Irigaray is seeking to question the situating of the divine within the visible/invisible paradigm; placed in opposition to the fleshly carnality and defilement of the body the spiritual dimension is based on a model of exclusion and exclusivity. We may see this process in Kristeva's theorisation of abjection,[21] which indicates the links with purity and the sacred against the debasement of the heterogeneous other, necessarily caught up in a move to expel, repulse or reject. But in this move to abject, we also note the connectedness it establishes with the abject - symbolised as the mother, animality (flesh,

faeces, the unclean) and death. It becomes impossible to establish these borders of demarcation with the clean divisions which are sought. Hence the abject is re-inscribed back into the process of the body, blurring the distinction between inner and outer.(22)

The attempted abjection of the mother as symbolically associated with otherness means that sexual difference is implicated in the process; women become aligned with with the abject. Kristeva notes the codifying of this move in Biblical traditions of purity and defilement.

The process of desire for the other interrupts the attempt to sustain these boundaries and bleeds into them once again, repulsion held in fascinated thrall.

> We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off what threatens it - on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger...Thus braided, woven, ambivalent, a heterogeneous flux marks out a territory that I can call my own because the Other, having dwelt in me as an alter ego, points it out to me through loathing.(23)

Kristeva accounts for the process which leaves the maternal/feminine in this ambiguous state, which also means it is coded as what is outside or beyond the symbolic, necessarily repressed such that signification can take place. It is only from the subject's signifying position in the symbolic that recognition of the abject can take place.

> ...the heterogeneous flow...already dwells in a human animal that has been highly altered (altéré; altered, made other to itself). I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be "me"...an Other who precedes and possesses me and through such possession causes me to be. A possession prior to my advent...(24)

Irigaray attempts to re-trace the process of this alignment of the abject and the feminine, and attempts to open a means of signifying what is 'lost'

in this process with more positive meaning. She is seeking an eroticised, sexuate notion of the divine, a transgressive relinking of the maternal/carnal and the dimension of spirit which will rewrite both. It seems that in her reading of Merleau-Ponty, the 'intra-uterine'(25) functions as critique of the visible/invisible paradigm in having material, tangible associations; undermining the division of inner/outer in being positioned within the body, and yet also forming a boundary between the internal body and its external topography. This notion of the undecidability of bodily boundaries and the mediating role of bodily fluids (mucous) is important to Irigaray. The thresholds of the body are more fluid in this respect than the face or the eyes.

> ...an other threshold of the passage from inner to outer, outer to inner, between inner and outer, the inner and the outer...Like, but different to, my face, the mucous tissues escape mastery.(26)

The connotations of bodily fluids, which are part of the subject's self identity and yet are also repulsed by it and from it, maps on to the abject in this sense.

Finally, the metaphoric association with a body constituted as feminine points to the omission in Merleau-Ponty's work of the situated body which is also gendered.

Irigaray points to the way Merleau-Ponty is outlining a phenomenology of intersubjectivity in the passing between interior and exterior, and 'the double crossing of the two maps', which might lead to an ethical acknowledgement of otherness. But she argues that a forgetting of 'the sensible medium' (in an echo of her notion of the sensible transcendental)

in and through which such passages are effected, is a forgetting of 'the mucous of the carnal'.(27) Implicit in this amnesia is a closure of questions of sexual difference and the horizon of the 'becoming divine' for women.

She suggests the (feminine) body is doubly written out, since on one level the body to which the divine is placed in oppositional relation - when this is constituted as the homogenous, inquiring subject - is masculine, privileged with access to transcendence. Irigaray sees this too as a paralysing confinement and seeks to open up these relations between the sexes, across their diagonal relations to a divine site of alterity, as well as to each sex's own ideal.

> Does a theology, an affirmative ontology, signify, otherwise to their negative connotations, the advent of either the parousia of God or of the other? Are these two parousias inseparable? Traversing the neutral space-time of the unremitting polemic - is this the solicitous return or reappearance of God and/or the other?
> Another dawning, new parousia necessarily accompanying that of an ethical God. Respecting the difference between him and her, in generation and creation, cosmic, aesthetic.(28)

To summarise, Irigaray intends the notions of the divine and sexual difference to effect the following changes;

- a possibility of respect for the other in creative/carnal dimensions
- an understanding of the way the divine works as an ideal for each sex but also across the two sexes. This demands 'keeping all the senses in openness...being attentive carnally and spiritually'(29)

- a way of understanding the processes of idealisation such that the divine will no longer be separable from the carnal, as a division of body/spirit or immanence/transcendence.

- such a move will also disrupt specular imagery via 'the sensible transcendental'; 'a theology inscribed in the flesh'. 'Must god always remain inaccessibly transcendent and unrealised -here and now- in and through the body?'(30)

- a different kind of access to alterity will invest these crisscrossing relations with greater intensity, passion and creative potential.

Merleau-Ponty is not unaware of the ethical implications of his project; he writes that his philosophy is not an expedient to solve the problem of the other, but to transform the whole problem.

> The other is no longer so much a freedom seen from without as destiny and fatality...he is caught up in a circuit that connects him to the world as we ourselves are, and consequently also in a circuit that connects him to us - (31)

There is a generality of the visible by virtue of the primordiality of the flesh. Signification is produced in dimensional gestures; the caress is not an act of will or mastery but a 'giving' or emergence of sense. But the moment of signification is still characterised by connectivity between beings. Merleau-Ponty writes of the 'strange adhesion' which binds beings together. There is a level of duality of consciousness and world, despite an embodied consciousness, despite a givenness to the world.

He describes 'reversibility' as 'a phenomenon which sustains perception and speech and manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea as well as by a sublimation of the flesh'.(32) But reversibility is in danger of resurrecting the very relation of fixity which he was concerned to rework ('any problems that remain are due to the fact that I retained the philosophy of consciousness'.)(33) If there is no interruption of this process it returns again to the same. Is the schema radical enough to effect new possibilities?(34)

Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body draws upon a historically sedimented discourse of the body - 'a sort of archaeology structured by a language already spoken'(35) which, if we accept the notion of the symbolic as a'mono-sexed discourse', is codified as masculine. In addition, if language is a pre-existent structure which shapes the reception and duplication of the 'emergent sense ' of the lived body, and each act of speech 'is offered to a universal word' as Merleau-Ponty suggests, it is indeed impossible to intervene on the process of signification in the way Irigaray wants. The circuit is closed again. 'Sedimentations of language weave between past and future and my actual words are rooted in the already said'.(36)

I will suggest the way out of this impasse is to examine again 'the obscure region' Merleau-Ponty claims is the projected origin or locale of the 'universal word'.

At the end of 'The Intertwining - the chiasm', Merleau-Ponty writes:

> ...the whole of philosophy... consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or wild meaning, an expression of experience by

experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language.(37)

This promise of a birth of wild meaning may lead us to examine the notion of pregnancy in Merleau-Ponty's work, prefiguring an understanding of Levinas' notion of maternity and the connection of this moment to a threshold of ethicality. In the notes for the remainder of the text we find quite extensive reference to pregnancy.

Merleau-Ponty characterises it symbolically as 'an orientation towards possibility'. The notion of orientation negotiates a conception of 'being that would be a cause of itself, identical and objective' and logical possibility in a Leibnizian sense, 'as that which is necessary'.(38) By this route Merleau-Ponty seeks to avoid a structure of identity as self-identical (something overflows it, there is an excess and a dimension of hiddenness), and also the strict chronology of cause and effect as giving a certain inevitability to an unfolding of experience, time and space.

To clarify this further we should explore his notion of Gestalt. He writes of Gestalt as a moment of the lived body, not an immediacy of experience, but 'a heavy signification, it is flesh...a bound and not free possibility...it is ready to integrate itself into a constellation that spans space and time' (but with a weight and fixity Merleau Ponty calls region or domain, as it is not free with relation to space and time but rather free from space and time considered as independent events in themselves). This moment of the lived body is not to be epistemologically trawled in depth nor constrained in the instant although it is intersected by these forces, and intersects them in its relations. He writes that

'pregnancy will show that since the gestalt arises from polymorphism, this situates us outside the philosophy of subject and object'.(39)

We may see how this radical splitting which is yet a situating and experience of the body is taken up to provide a means of 'thinking otherwise' to philosophies of dichotomy.

Merleau-Ponty further relates this discussion to transcendence. The Gestalt moment of the lived body is a heteronomous experience, 'not a pure agile nothingness but an inscription in an open register, in a lake of non-being, in an Eröffnung, in an offene'.(40) But this open structure is precisely opened by a structure which 'pre-figures' it, and gives onto an instantiation, which will be an intrinsic regulation. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls empirical pregnancy.

> It consists in defining each perceived being by a structure or system of equivalencies about which it is disposed... It is a question of that logos that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing, inasmuch as it varies around a certain type of message, which we can have an idea of only through our carnal participation in its sense, only by espousing by our body its manner of 'signifying' -or that logos uttered whose internal structure sublimates our carnal relation with the world.(41)

There is a certain structuring to meaning which shapes and allows the comprehension of our carnal embodiment, which is referred to in that such carnal moments are 'pregnant' with the ciphers of transcendence - they allude to the rupture and division of the conditions of their possibility as they signify. Pregnancy is thus a power to break forth, productivity and fecundity - as excess and possibility, as well as 'typicality' - a certain fulfilment of its own type. 'It is the form which has arrived at itself that is itself...identity in depth (dynamic identity) transcendence

as being-at-a-distance'.(42)

The anticipation and expectation of excess infiltrates containment, yet also acts as an intensification of that moment or threshold, intensifies in this form with reference to a prior network of meanings which can generate and guarantee that intensity. As the symbolic structure of this notion also connotes its sexuate and experiential dimension we can link it to a search for a feminist 'vocabulary' of the body.

The whole body becomes a sensorium, inscribed with an open weave of textual and semiotic possibilities, a materiality of signs which might be corporeally realised.

But there are only hints of a development of this possibility in Merleau-Ponty's work. In considering what is at stake in the phenomenological shaping of such a notion, Claude Lefort (the editor of Merleau-Ponty's posthumously published notes) presses the issue with regard to the political and historical dimension of signification and the framework of psychoanalysis. In his view, the question of pregnancy in Merleau-Ponty's work is crucial, because it raises the question of the origins of the existent and the pre-reflective dimension of experience. His challenge to Merleau-Ponty is couched in terms of a questioning of the limits of phenomenology. What is it that allows for Merleau-Ponty's thought? For Lefort, this issue is taken up in respect of genesis or origin. Where does the flesh emerge <u>from</u>? In Merleau-Ponty's work sensibility seems to emerge in a gathering or concantration of forces equivalent to a 'self-begetting'. Lefort writes:

> Emergence, coming of itself to itself, coiling up, reversal, homogeneity, resemblance, doubling, divergence from the inside to the outside: each of these images is bound to clarify the description of the flesh. And such a description tends to be that of a genesis...a question of a bizarre begetting. A singular sensible emerges from the mass of the sensible by a sort of coiling up, and through redoubling, turns back on itself...(44)

Lefort points out that this image of birth as self-begetting is a way of questioning the self as an image of singular origin, and also allows the possibility of reconceptualising the self-present notions of time and space. But, he argues, Merleau-Ponty still emphasises the 'external' relation of subject/object in his obedience to the visual mode of perception. In writing of vision as 'adherence', the self may be strange and other to itself, but its connection to 'the mass of the sensible' remains in the representational mode. Merleau-Ponty characterises this connection as 'the hinges of being', which is to say, it is a connection still available for presentation to consciousness.

But Lefort finds suggestions of a different approach in Merleau-Ponty's texts too:'a new type of being, being by porosity, pregnancy, generality'.(45) This approach would open up separation and the 'dehiscence' of others, rather than the fusion and adherence which stress the other as placed in a pre-determined framework. Lefort acknowledges the relation of ambivalent asymmetry exemplified in the experience of the child. But like Lacan, he argues the child comes into a world already 'tamed' in its meanings(46) and is faced with the name and the law as encounters with the Other. The child's relation with the mother's body is sensate 'prior' to vision, already intersected by sensibility, but without a perspectival relation to meaning. It is the structures of signification

which will provide the perspective. Merleau-Ponty attempts to deny the determinism implicit in this, arguing against a coherent historical narrative, transparently representing social relations to itself, in his critique of Marxist theory. He also argues against a view of signification as rational and self-present.

But Lefort argues that such internally divided meanings require the intervention of 'the third', the dimension of historical meaning as grounding, to allow for the possibility of justice and judgement. If Merleau-Ponty wishes to condemn totalitarian thinking and to argue for anti-colonialism, Lefort suggests, he must retain a notion of the 'real' of history as the framework for this ethical position. For Lefort, only the acknowledgement of such a perspective protects Merleau-Ponty's view from collapsing into the relativism of 'the observance of difference in the web of social relations'(47) and the endless circulation of signification. Otherwise there is only the 'reversibility' of subjects interpreting their own embodiment immanently. There could be no indication that the already 'tamed' arena of meanings into which the child enters presents any possibility of justice to counter totalitarian thinking, whether this is in intersubjective relations or in the wider political arena.(48)

In her discussion of Merleau Ponty and Levinas in Saints and Post-modernism,(49) Edith Wyschogrod points to a notion which she terms 'carnal generality' present in both thinkers. This is a notion prior to conceptualisation, a mode of meaning which is not yet ossified into a restrictive universal. It becomes exhibited in 'carnal generals', the 'context specific complexes' which incarnate this prior meaning. Although

characterised as an experiential matrix which precedes conceptuality, this matrix does not fall into an unrestricted idealism, because it is already itself indicative of a 'trace' of significations. Carnal generality is 'placed' prior to conceptualisation to give it the radicality of a kind of primordial responsibility. Although it intersects in and through signification, it signifies itself as a corporeal language, or rather a kind of musicality, that 'vibrates as it disjoins'.(50)

We can note certain parallels with Kristeva's notion of the semiotic here, described as an oralising pulsion regenerating through and across the phallic economy.

> Oralisation is a re-union with the mother's body which is no longer viewed as an engendering, hollow and vaginated, expelling and rejecting body, but rather as a vocalic one - throat, voice and breasts; music,rhythm, prosody, paragrams and the prophetic parabola...(51)

The difference is that Kristeva and Irigaray attempt to activate the associations of this 'carnal generality' with the feminine/maternal symbolisation to use it as a strategic political device. This strategic possibility is not so explicit in Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, although it can be expanded upon as an interpretative possibility.

The 'carnal generals' are not material essences which would be the reconstitution of bodies as objects. Mortality and sexuality are not added on to a pre-existent figure. Rather, the experiential dimension coincides in the matrices of the lived body, indicating the trace of 'carnal generality'.

However, for Merleau-Ponty this notion is still connective and adhesive. As Alphonso Lingis writes;

> ...for Merleau-Ponty carnal intimacy is the locus of emergence of sense. The inner configuration of the other is captured in one's corporeal axes and one's own dynamic diagram is exposed in palpable reality.(52)

It is suggested that Merleau-Ponty's desire to maintain the materiality of excess forecloses on a recognition of the other who really differs. As Wyschogrod writes;

> Levinas and Merleau-Ponty agree that the psycho-physical primordium that is the incarnate subject is a primordial expression of generality. Universals and essences are abstractions derived from this more primitive experiential matrix...
> Merleau-Ponty argues, however, that generality is more primordially exhibited in the incarnate subject, an ensemble of self-transcending acts and lingual capacities. Levinas too seeks a more primitive locus for generality and finds it not in the subject but in the alterity of other persons as the Other impacts on the self.(53)

She adds that Levinas recognises an irreparable breach of difference between self and Other, whereas in some senses Merleau-Ponty is still concerned to heal that breach. 'Even if Merleau-Ponty has grasped the significance of prediscursive corporeality for the emergence of generality, he has suppressed the condition of difference between self and Other that makes moral relations possible'.(54)

In order to develop this approach to the other in an embodied phenomenology, it is now necessary to consider whether Levinas provides an alterity which is radical enough to acknowledge difference, but also whether this does not involve the cancellation of difference in the level of carnal generality. Levinas has recourse to an alterity as an asymmetrical revelation of difference. While he resists the revelatory

aspect of an absolute alterity as God, it must still be questioned whether his notion of alterity does not return a universality to questions of otherness and ethics. In the context of sexual difference this would correspond to the subsuming of difference under a generalised ethicality.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CARESS: LEVINAS, IRIGARAY AND THE ETHICS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

In the previous chapter, the relationship between phenomenology in the context of erotic relations and Irigaray's feminist perspective on 'the feminine/maternal' in philosophy was examined. Certain distinctions between Merleau-Ponty and Levinas have already been noted. In this chapter, the phenomenological perspective on touch and 'the feminine' will be explored further, this time in the context of the work of Levinas. Irigaray and Levinas take up some of the possibilities suggested in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of 'the flesh' and in his attempt to rework the experiential dimension of intersubjective relations. But both question whether his reliance on the networks of signification offers a sufficiently radical version of alterity to be called ethical.
Irigaray's project to 're-interpret the whole relationship between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic'(1), should be recalled.

The project of reinterpretation of these structures agrees with Levinas' attempt to 'recommence' philosophy in order to stress the primacy of the ethical. Both agree that ontology and rationality have been symbolically characterised as masculine; Irigaray writes 'all theories of the subject have always been appropriated to the masculine'(2), and Levinas writes of 'the virility of the force of Being'(3). Both agree in addition that the recognition of the excluded 'feminine' presents an ethical challenge to the structures of philosophical discourse. Levinas writes: ' ...the feminine

is not merely the unknowable, but a mode of being which consists in slipping away from the light'...'the feminine is described as the of itself other, as the very origin of the concept of alterity'.(4)

Two criticisms levelled at Irigaray and Levinas in the context of this immense project are that it is essentialist, already carving up the world in terms of sexual difference, or it is utopian, positing a place beyond discourse where otherness could be developed into a (feminine) radical alterity.(5) But if we see this work as a project which seeks to critique the edifice of Western rationality, the path of ontology and the impasse of the legacy of Enlightenment humanism, which has effectively effaced the question of sexual difference, it becomes difficult to speak of a starting point or a final goal. It is an attempt to set out a mode of thinking which is precisely begging the questions of origin (a starting from sexual difference as essentialist) and of telos (as part of an unfolding story). To begin elsewhere would require a transformation which does not seek the security of a teleological inquiry. Therefore it would be a reiteration or repetition of the same, to name sexual difference as the cause, or name utopia as the outcome.

Like Levinas, Irigaray attempts to re-conceptualise the very terms of thought, with our most basic framework of cause/effect, subject/object and chronological order. Both seek an 'otherwise',(6) which would be a way of articulating a space significant enough to be called ethical. And both hope to express this space via some notion of irreducible difference, the very possibility of ethicality arising through a different understanding of otherness.

If the process of signification is constantly referring elsewhere in its general economy of proliferation and decay, it seems there could be no meaning without the structures which are meaning; in other words (if there could be other words!), no excess, except the endless replay of the circuits of signification, itself a generative and regenerative possibility. But Irigaray and Levinas detect in this move to signification (in the name of a move away from the constrictions of onto-theology as metaphysical identity), a possible abdication of ethicality and any basis for judgement at all. Instead of returning to the solid basis of identity thinking, previously a grounding for discussing agency and ethical will, they precisely seek to sketch an excess, not as a wholly metaphysical otherness, nor as something which originates egotistically and idealistically from the self. For Levinas, the permanent openness to a dimension of otherness is a perspective which can open onto the transformation to an ethical mode, but one which requires the feminine as facilitating such a transformation. Although the feminine hereby is written into the scheme of philosophy at its heart, inscribing what has been most left out, there is a danger that the feminine, despite becoming intrinsic, is also instrumentalised.

Having explicated the first steps to a possible morality as the forgetting of the prioritising of self, instead to allow the world to become enjoyment and nourishment, Levinas goes against a morality which begins from the self, and so must see the world as temptation to sin, or as something to be endured. The notion of enjoyment situates human life in the practicalities of work and life, where we are. For Levinas, any morality of otherworldliness, death or privation is meaningless. However, the

mysterious dimension of otherness does break into our lives, not as absolute absence, but through the other.

In contrast to a Platonic world of light where everything is theoretically graspable, visible, but also blindingly beyond our reach, a world where corporeality is subordinate to ideality, Levinas expresses the erotic relation as sensually immediate, the 'originary' place of alterity. The proximate relationship is the place of ethics, and one which refuses to discuss relations in the abstract, as merely beings carelessly close to one another. The neighbour is 'pressed up against me' in a difference which is a'non-indifference to the other'.(7)

For Levinas, the relation of lovers is not as complementary forces, as this would suppose love as a fusion between two equal beings, and a prior whole: '...two complementary terms presuppose a pre-existing whole. To say that sexual duality presupposes a whole is to posit love beforehand as fusion'.(8) For Levinas, the pathos of love is an essentially unreconcil ed difference. The relation to the other is with an alterity which 'always slips away'.(9) Further, the mode of the absolutely other is coded as the feminine.

> ...the absolutely contrary contrary..., the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the <u>feminine</u>.(10)

Levinas tries to extricate this characterisation of a 'mode of being' from 'any romantic notions of the mysterious, unknown or misunderstood woman' we might find in Dante or Goethe, or the cult of Woman in chivalry or modern society, descriptions of otherness which, by their distanced idealism, merely replicate the category of Woman as Other and do not realise the kind

of alterity as a dimension Levinas is trying to describe. He agrees in this respect with the criticisms made of the freezing of mobility in the Ideal Woman, and he also accedes to 'the legitimate claims of the feminism which presupposes all the acquired attainments of civilisation'.(11) He makes it clear that we are supposed to recognise the symbolic connection of otherness and Woman he is activating, which recalls the equation of Woman as Other (person), but which also recalls a more mysterious otherness (the 'feminine' as equivocation). In order to approach the question of ethics in a different fashion, Levinas is taking on the whole symbolic network of the equation of Woman as Other. This approach is a difficult enough undertaking, but one not wholly alien to many feminists who recognise the necessity of facing up to this symbolic network in order to understand and therefore challenge its intricacies, rather than denying it.(12)

Levinas describes the feminine at the edge of (Platonic) light, a drawing away. For Plato, according to Levinas, the feminine is 'thought within the categories of passivity and activity and reduced to matter'. There is no specificity accorded to men and women in this respect; the feminine is merely an illustration of a distant Idea. Thus others are all identified with each other, a collective with a shared quest for truth. Levinas opposes this side-by-side with an other addressing the self, face-to-face without intermediary, without an appeal to the kind of truth which would otherwise come between them. This direct immediacy, avoiding any certainty of truth, will then take place at the edges of uncertainty, where signification is about to break down. 'What one presents as the failure of communication in love precisely constitutes the positivity of the relationship'.(13)

But despite Levinas' characterisation of the feminine as privileged event, access to the kind of alterity which is an exceptional relation, if the feminine is equated with the edges of the breakdown of meaning, where does this leave women? It seems to place them back at the borders of signification, as providing the missing mediation between the infinity of otherness and the subjectivity as ego. If this is so, then they will find it difficult to be ethical since they are what makes ethics possible already.(14)

If the feminine is seen as a mode of being available for both men and women, its symbolic connection with women and the breakdown of communication still remains. It gives men the edge, as the feminine remains other to their identity, allowing them to take on feminine equivocation while retaining a privileged relation to signification. But Levinas also explicitly denies this separation of qualities from identities. He writes: 'the feminine is not added to an object and a Thou antecedently given or encountered in the neuter (the sole gender formal logic knows)'.(15) So he wants to maintain a necessary connectivity between symbolic and corporeal figuration (the feminine as absolute alterity is not just symbolic, but must have some connection with women positioned as other).

This ambiguity is precisely what provokes the dizzying, difficult spirals of feminist readers of Levinas. Levinas says Freud identifies the ego's search for pleasure but that he doesn't seek for the significance of this in 'the general economy of being', meaning that Freud still assumes pleasure as originating in some sense in the libido of the self, and caught in an economy of desire emanating from the self. Levinas says he wants to

account for its exceptional place, as a voluptuousness which precedes and questions even these categories of self-hood, as 'the very event of the future'. The move he makes is a radical claim otherwise to a difference based in biological sex.(16) But this may also be a return to the questions of philosophy, albeit of a different order, in a search for the ethical/metaphysical site of otherness, and a move away from the historically diagnostic possibilities of psychoanalysis for sexual difference. Although Levinas stresses the way that the erotic is a kind of 'failure' in the domain of knowing, grasping or possessing - a reproach to the demands of subjectivity to be in control, which corresponds to the notion of the unconscious in psychoanalysis - he also seeks to recollect his explosive otherness for a project of generalised ethicality. This is effected through his recognition of the importance of the philosophical questions of transcendence, ethics and time, which seem to deny the role of historical contingency (for example, in changing conceptions of sex roles). And yet, he also recognises the networks of signification and exteriority, the effective 'constraints' of language which enforce - provoke - him to speak as a man for whom the feminine is 'essentially other'.
His characterisation of 'feminine' alterity exemplifies his equivocation between sexual difference as the recognition of otherness, and the ethical impact of absolute alterity. He has tried to characterise such equivocation as the undecidability which could resist a straightforward duality, whereby the feminine would be secondary. Equivocation is intended to resist, move away and oscillate on the wavering boundary where communication is just about to break down.

Nevertheless we might still recognise the 'story' of philosophy, the conversation of philosophers about 'the feminine'. For example: the debate between Derrida and Levinas on this question of otherness and the feminine. In 'En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici',(17) Derrida takes on the voice of the feminine to address the otherness of Levinas's writing on alterity and the femininity; placing himself in the fictional role of Woman/writer as other, in order to consider alterity with E.L. ('elle'). The dissemblance allows him both to encounter the slipping of meaning and sexual identity where the pronouns he, she and I are in flux, and to participate in the discursive structures which allow him to speak (write) of such slippage. Like the Song of Songs, the exchange of voices is an access to that desirable loss of the identifying marks of sexual difference, but unlike the anonymous Biblical author, it is precisely Derrida's assured (masculine) identity which allows him to play this game.

> If what I say remains false, falsifying, flawed, it is within the measure whereby disymmetry (I speak now from my position of woman, supposing she be definable) can also reverse the perspectives, while leaving the schema intact.(18)

Where is this voice coming from? The disembodied feminine voice in the text is still philosophy's feminine; the mysterious, veiled, posited voice which speaks with the voice of metaphor which might not be the voice of speaking women. As Rosi Braidotti writes:

> Isn't it strange that it is precisely at the time in history when women have made their voices heard socially, politically and theoretically, that philosophical discourse - a male domain par excellence - takes over the feminine for himself?(19)

Reading within and against the philosophical tradition, Irigaray also recognises the specular logic which places women as absence, hence outside, or 'beyond' representation. The castrated woman is the aberration, 'nothing to be seen' means she deviates from the norm, and what she doesn't have, guarantees for the man the security of having, as well as the fear of losing. Commentating on the history of philosophy from the 'outside' (from where she is also able to analyse its attempted exclusion of women), she is also demonstrating her rejection of a position beyond representation. Her reading of Levinas demonstrates this plural position. Largely sympathetic to a project seeking an alterity 'otherwise than being' which yet demands the attention of the philosophical tradition, a project which profoundly recognises sexual difference, and the relation of masculinity with the desire for singular truth;[20] still, she is reading from the position of a woman and recognising her relegation to the feminine, wondering what, if anything, can be salvaged for herself and other women.

So in reading Levinas in her essay 'The Fecundity of the Caress',[21] she picks up a difference within the feminine difference, between the feminine lover (amante, active) and the loved one (aimée, passive), a strategic linguistic difference which allows her to speculate a kind of masculine and feminine in the feminine. The Lover remains masculine.[22]

L'aimée, one aspect of the feminine, is the oppositional otherness, represented as absolute fluidity. In the relations between the lover and l'aimée, he loses himself in that abyss of difference (is she the abyss?). 'Both of them lost, each in the other, on the wrong side, the other side, of transcendence'.[23] Dangerously, she is bidden to 'freeze into the

shapes that separate her from herself'. Thus formed, she can either become 'a night more primaeval than the night' (silence, darkness, loss of communication), or find herself 'dispersed in the shards of a broken mirror' (fragmented, reflected in the image the lover has made for her). Either way, she is frozen into an image made for her, which constricts her inward movement and constrains the fluidity of difference as a creative and dynamic relation. This otherness is also, however, the otherness which attunes her to the cyclical/generative pulse of a mysterious relation to the cosmos, a time and space codified as 'other' to the world of responsible ethical subjects in self-conscious agency. This otherness is more like nature, the hidden and inaccessible symbolism which nevertheless is supposed to ground subjectivity. This otherness is not merely the physical corporeality of 'infancy, animality or maternity', but rather the relation to gestation, 'participation in the construction of a world that does not forget natural generation and the human being's part in the preservation of its efflorescence'.(24)

So the different aspects of feminine alterity are 1) as a reflection or complement of the lover, a relation which opens up difference in the erotic realm but is in danger of recuperating differences if it is not interrupted, or 2) the connection to a certain mystic relation to the cosmos which presents the possibility of absolute difference in its unlimited multiplicity, but which may also be emprisoned as such, in lacking access to the world of linearity and chronology.

The woman lover, l'amante, is 'not subjected to alternations of fire and ice'. Her activity gives her back to her own movements; 'she also revives

herself in the warmth and does not simply receive it from the other...she tends towards her own fulfilment, already unfolds herself to gather in more'. So l'amante takes on her own fecundity to be regenerated, a possibility Irigaray calls blossoming or efflorescence.(25)

We must question whether a woman is both l'aimée and l'amante, an oscillation in herself of active and passive, such that women could have some space to move in these identities? Or does Irigaray suggest both could already be interpretation of the woman who has no identity as such? If Irigaray means the latter, then women find themselves already named, either as passive, oppositionally feminine, or active within the prescribed terms of masculine subjectivity and therefore left with no opportunity to intervene in the terms of identity.

This difficulty is suggested if language is the difficult network which inscribes both l'aimée and l'amante. Irigaray describes language as annexing, capturing and captivating the other.

> Deployment of a network that extends over everything and deprives it of its most intimate breath and growth. A garment that first and foremost paralyses the other's movement...Even if she plays, within this male territory, at disguising herself in numerous displays... she remains without an identity or passport with which to traverse, to transgress, the lover's language.(26)

The difficulty of working through a different kind of relation to signification leads us to question how flexible the relation between otherness as possibility of signification and the subject can be. It seems that Levinas is concerned to open a different kind of relation. The

apparent privilege of the lover and his relation to God (as aspect of the mystery of alterity) is certainly disrupted in Levinas' insistence on the feminine, but if she is not to be merely instrumental, we must question her own relation to alterity. For Irigaray, it is the feminine (l'aimée/l'amante) lover's relation to the future of fecundity[27] which permits regeneration, the 'not yet' opening on to the future. In rejecting the light which is the light of truth, of illuminating vision, returning into darkness to re-emerge and wait for 'the light that shines through discourse, that filters through words, that bestows a sense of the cosmos', she too has access to 'contemplation prior to any vision'.[28]

This recalls the characterisation of the female mystic saints, in Lacan's terms, the women who experience a 'jouissance that goes beyond'; the beginnings of a description of women's experience as that which can be experienced but apparently remains unrepresentable. The impossible relation to language relegates the mystic saints to inexpressible, irreducible jouissance. Lacan adds;

> Might not this jouissance which one experiences and knows nothing of, be that which puts us on the path of existence? And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as supported by feminine jouissance?[29]

Indicating a feminine facet to the place of God draws attention to the equivalent mystification of Woman, the negative role which props up the truth of man's relation to God and to his own self-knowledge. She is the Other, a fantasy projected as elsewhere to protect such truth. As such, in the beyond where meaning falters, the question of women's sexuality is

precisely the one which cannot be asked, since it is both the ground (as undisclosed fantasy) of truth, and void of otherness (as slippage of language). So, according to Lacan, Woman is the other with no essence, no essential subjectivity.

However, the moment of ecstasy, loss of the self, provides a momentary place of fluidity, orgasmic, outside the stasis of sameness. The etymology of the Greek word: ek; outside, histemi; place, is taken up in Irigaray's texts as ex- tase. In the most passive, abject acceptance of a mystic experience which inscribes her into the patriarchal logic, the female mystic mimics Christ's silent suffering and imitates God as that which exceeds all representation...here, perhaps, opening a facet enough to begin her own self-representation...?

Irigaray's suggestions here go against the received wisdom (Lacan, Derrida) of the Law of the Father as guarantee of subjection (hence subjectivity) to/in language, and the no-where else of that system. Irigaray sketches a heretical, because symbolically pre-linguistic, otherness. The prior, undifferentiated fluidity is intended to restore a specificity to femininity which would accord a subjective unity to women. 'The privileged relationship of women to that origin gives them access to an archaic form of expressivity outside the circuit of linguistic exchange'.(30)

It is the potential of the maternal body (fecundity) which provides this symbolic fluidity. The woman is both undifferentiated (as prior to the splitting effect of entering language), but she is also plural, experiencing herself as other (the child within the mother but also part of

her). The symbolic function of the maternal body is this self-eroticism which means the woman is in touch with herself, with the other in herself. Simultaneously, she is 'prior' to language and so, Irigaray implies, has a privileged relation to touch.

Irigaray and Levinas agree on the importance of touch in that it expresses the potentiality of reconceptualising a relation to the other, suggesting a different mode of alterity (Levinas terms it a 'regime of tenderness') though erotic relations 'otherwise' to the mastery and self-possession of the subject. For Levinas, non-signifyingness in Eros clouds the clarity of vision. The caress goes beyond the sensible, but not further than the senses.

> The caress consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough, in soliciting what slips away as though it were not yet. It searches, it forages. It is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search; a movement unto the invisible...what the caress seeks is not situated in a perspective and in the light of the graspable.(31)

For Irigaray, the caress indicates this distinct relation with the other's alterity; it is the 'touch untouched by mastery', by which the schema of control and the fixity of subject/object is altered. Possession is suspended. It is

> A new birth, which deconstitutes and reconstitutes contemplation by returning it to the source of all the senses - the sense of touch. There is no longer any image there, except for the letting go and giving of self. With the hands, among other ways. Sculpting, shaping, as if for the first time.(32)

Here it appears that the conditional 'as if' is essential. Irigaray indicates the suspension of conditions expressed in the 'not yet', a hypothetical future understanding of difference, as yet unrealised. But it is also a recollection of that which is inevitably past.(33)

When Irigaray reintroduces the conditions of difference in her re-situating of the caress between masculine lover and feminine (l'aimée/l'amante), the distinction between her position and Levinas' is made explicit. She seems to warn of the risk that the feminine could continue to be the means by which the lover guarantees his own maintainance of the same. This would happen through the lover's refusal to recognise the woman as precisely more than animality or as facilitating access to God.

> The act of love would amount to contact with the irrationality of discourse, in order to send the loved one back to the position of fallen animal or infant, and to man's ecstasy in God.(34)

The masculine lover may fall into the separation of the erotic from his 'ethical responsibilities', the separation of body and spirit, thereby denying the space of alterity. This duality of transcendence/immanence produces a totality which cannot allow a 'porosity' of difference, the kind of interval which would facilitate a more ethical relation of the other. Until this is developed in the new birth of sexual/ethical relations, the relation to transcendence remains codified in masculine terms. Hence, the relation of paternity as an open dimension to the infinity of futures still endangers the place of the feminine and of women and 'puts the other at a permanent risk of loss of self in the wrong infinity'.(35) 'The son becomes the lover's ornament and display of the same as self, the position

of the lover's identity in relation to and through paternity...as the lover's means of return to himself outside himself, the son closes the circle'.(36) Contrary to Levinas, Irigaray suggests that the son does not open up a relation with infinity, but closes it off in repetition. This is because both sexes have not had the opportunity to work out their relations to difference and to the divine in a less destructive way.

Equally, God could become 'the guarantee of a deadly infinity' if the relation is used to obliterate respect for the other, used as 'a prop on man's ethical journey'.(37) Irigaray is not denying the place of a divine relation, which in fact is characterised as that which can 'aid and further the fulfilment of the other...The transcendence of "God" can help in the dicovery of the other as other...'.(38)

The danger is the neglect of the feminine lover's (l'amante) return to herself, the responsibility of both masculine lover and feminine. He, if he encounters only himself in the other, uses her for his own ends, and thereby returns any possibility of a different conception of ethical/sexual relations back into 'the abyss'. And she, if she 'lets herself be taken but does not give herself...quits the locus of all responsibilities, her own ethical site'.(39)

By using terms like respect and responsibility in the context of the erotic, Irigaray aims for a different order of ethicality, a potential she expresses as 'the song of the beloved', and elsewhere as 'carnal ethics'. The possibility of this song opens onto an as yet unknown future.

> Manifest in and through writing. Absent and awaited in spirit. Whose voice would have been silent for a long time. A seriousness that is hard to maintain, which history would try and rediscover, uncover through the text.(40)

For Irigaray then, this is the opening where a 'feminist ethics' could begin, although it is an ethics which is no longer 'ethical' in the traditional western philosophical sense. It is a potentiality which has recourse to dreams, the subjective world of desires, poetic and mystical discourse. But it has at heart a 'political' aim (if it can be called such, since it implicitly calls for a revaluation of these terms), since it is specifically a feminine 'song' which is to discovered and developed.(41)

Levinas' project seems to return respect and responsibility to a generalised ethical project at this point since he would not (or could not) subscribe to the political implications of Irigaray's project. There is no suggestion that the feminine in Levinas ever could - or should - change its status, or how its relation to women-as-such operates.

However, it is still necessary to suggest how Irigaray may be called political, against the charge that she falls into an ahistorical essentialism, and that her temptation to begin outlining 'the song of the beloved' is impossibly, inevitably utopic.

The problems of beginning to outline a feminine otherness which could be related to a female subjectivity re-collected as whole are those occasioned by describing the structure of language as masculine in the first place. For Lacan, certainly, this feminist enterprise is doomed to failure. The specificity of a female jouissance, (which he seems to hint at, albeit on

an experiential level only), is disallowed, firstly because the subject can have no immediate access to the body as such, once the entry into language effects the separation of immediacy. The relation is thereby rendered imaginary. Secondly, Lacan states it is language which places the feminine as other, not because there is an essential difference. Any assertion of essential difference therefore can only take place through language, which returns any assertion of female jouissance under the male term, already recuperated.

Irigaray's defiance is an attempt to make space for an incomprehensible voice which cannot speak. She wants the impossible dream; the phallic mother, the woman who maintains a specificity at once fluid and multiple, but with the powerful logic of a symbolic order 'of her own'. This desire is nowhere prescriptive, but manifest in the painstaking analysis of the hidden (fantasmic) feminine unconscious of the story of philosophy, a desire to uncover, expose, question. The defiance of critique is a procedure of 'jamming the theoretical machinery, of suspending its pretension to the production of truth';(42) and in such a way that the old logic (such as the question 'what is woman?')is disrupted by excess on the feminine side. Indicating the underside of this logic exposes the extent of its delusion; things which seem utterly real are shown to be part of a fanatical protection of fantasy. Therefore the reiteration of questions which are asked about the relation of symbolisation and the lives of women in social situatedness are the most provoking. The felt experience of symbolisation as other is an imposition when women actually live and participate in the complex arrangements of social structures. Once we recognise the contingency of such social structures and the relative

contingency of symbolic 'realities', the possibility of change must be allowed. Irigaray is accused of ahistorical description, as if the organisation of sexual difference has remained unchanging through centuries. But the process of uncovering the structures which govern social and symbolic does point to change, in the very understanding of its systematic denial and exclusion.

If Irigaray confines herself largely to the analysis of the story of philosophical rationality, then perhaps she recognises its own situating of itself as the master discourse on such subjects. The place where rationality comments on itself is the place to begin looking for repression. As Andrea Nye comments(43), feminist practice can still subvert, even those philosophies which appear most benevolent to the feminine, by still asking how the language games (she names Derrida, Lacan, Foucault) which have 'split textuality from a world in which rape, abuse and murder still take place', relate to women's lives. A feminist perspective can highlight some of the blindspots in the philosophical enterprise, in its attempts to stress a more versatile philosophical practice which is open enough to speculate on its countless exclusions and excisions.

The relation between Levinas and Irigaray is haunted by the following question, as formulated by Tina Chanter; 'Which comes first, the ethical relation or the feminine relation?...Which relation,if one can put it thus, is more transcendent, the feminine or the Other?'.(44)
The terms of this question are further complexified by Levinas' resistance to choosing either way. Nevertheless, this cannot prevent the pursuit of

the implications of the two accounts as they are found in his work, nor the implications of the option of equivocating between the two.

In Totality and Infinity we are presented with an erotic relation which is already ethical; the realm of sensibility as an encounter with the other is to be thought indispensably as a relation of responsibility. The insistence upon keeping the ethical and erotic in conjunction serves a double purpose; not only is sensibility emphatically positioned in embodiment - a challenge to any ethics of the mind or consciousness, which seeks to put the will of the rational agent as the main concern of ethics at the expense of the body, but conversely the realm of the erotic is not situated 'outside' or beyond the concern of ethics.

Levinas has another reason for maintaining ethics and the erotic together. He attempts to rethink ethics other than as a relation to death or non-being (as it is, he implies, in Sartre or Heidegger). The negativity of this construction, while it establishes death as a horizon to being, does so in a way that positions ethics as fundamentally in a tragic role, as keeping together what will fall apart at the horizon of being and the margins of existence. Levinas also indicates that a preoccupation with death tends to make awareness of one's own mortality the place of morality, rather than first and foremost any concern for the other. If death and non-being are the only spurs to ethical action, I am mindful of my own demise and its relation to lived existence before a relation to others, even though my situation among them is required such that ethics can take place at all.(45)

In contrast, Levinas focusses on the erotic, pleasure and enjoyment, to redress the balance. If ethics is only connected with death, either as

contrasting from death or as made possible by its horizon, we run the risk of occluding the strands of sexuality and pleasure implicated in the picture too, which by extension may also lead to an exclusion of difference. Without pleasure, the process becomes another way of writing the body out of ethics.

This is not to say that the relation to death is obliterated from Levinasian ethics, although he makes constant provisos to separate his work from Heidegger.

1. Death cannot be approached with lucidity and hence with 'supreme virility'(46) - it cannot be known as an experience, except insofar as it is unknowable, so it cannot be known as an utmost possibility of freedom, or as making 'the very feat of grasping a possibility'. Levinas writes: 'Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom, whereas for me the subject seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering...It is not with the nothingness of death of which we know precisely nothing, that our analysis must begin, but with the situation where something absolutely unknowable appears'.(47)

2. Death announces passivity and suffering, and this can be seen as an undergoing, the surrender of claims to mastery. This description of those modes of being which do not duplicate domination and the 'virility' of being foreshadows the discussion of passivity as the deepest form of responsibility in Otherwise Than Being.(48)

One advantage of prioritising the horizon of death in ethics is the means by which this horizon negotiates the problems of sexual difference which Levinas must tackle in re-introducing the erotic. What specifically marks

the erotic is the encounter between sexuate bodies, which is precisely what draws Irigaray to the philosophy of Levinas, since it is an opening of questions concerning sexual difference. Of her two pieces on Levinas, 'The Fecundity of the Caress' is far more equivocal, allusive and eliptical than the later 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas'. On the surface, it would seem that a feminist reading would always maintain that sexual difference must be the first question, since it is only if this difference is seen to penetrate to the most hidden levels that it can resist being conscripted back into the neutral again. But Irigaray is equivocal herself on this fundamental question; she writes of 'a caress that precedes every caress' and 'a becoming in which the other gives of a space-time which is still free'.(49) This hint of a prior relation to a horizon which, in its non-determination, could provide a way of referring difference into a different mode of understanding, in the future which is yet to come. This possible new relation would be 'bathing in a horizon that goes beyond intention, it says what is hidden without exhausting it in a meaning'.(50)
She is preoccupied, in this essay, by the problem of a 'remembrance' of what has not yet taken place, which would be the birth of new relations and possibilities of difference.

> 'The memory of the flesh as the place of approach...the memory of touching? The most persisting and the most difficult to make comply with memory...Memory of the flesh, where what has not yet been written is inscribed, laid down? What has no discourse to wrap itself in? What has not yet been born into language? What has a place, has taken place, but has no language. The felt, which expresses itself for the first time.(51)

This memory is a horizon of 'the already and the not yet'. Irigaray is alluding to the figuration of the symbolic feminine/maternal, prior to

birth and not yet given expression. In order to write of this possibility at all, she has recourse to something like Levinas' notion of the trace, which is like a fissure of that which is unrepresentable and only comes to be known as the third which has passed, and surpassed, the conditions of representation. To avoid being contrued as an essential otherness, we must also recognise the extent to which it interweaves in the present moment as well, establishing difference in the heart of 'the felt', the moment of experience and the erotic dimension. For Irigaray, this is the divine, which will engage the possibility of future reconceptualisations of relations of difference.(52)

'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas'(53) presses further on the above issues. The decidability of this question does not correspond to a straightforward dilemma between feminist (material sexual difference) or non-feminist (a neutral notion of alterity) positions. Both positions provide a convincing way of articulating difference for feminism; the first in its direct and immediate experience of embodiment which stresses the materiality of bodies and their meanings; the second in providing access to another dimension of otherness which can escape the circularity of dual difference. And Irigaray has recourse to both these positions in the course of her work. These positions correspond to a phenomenological dimension; the face to face encounter of difference, and the metaphysical relation to that which lies 'other' to otherness. Irigaray does not attack either of these positions in favour of the other; rather she uses the phenomenological dimension to explicate a theory of sexual difference, but she also elaborates the metaphysical dimension as that which will allow women to 'become divine for themselves'. But she also has criticisms to make of

each of these positions; the phenomenological dimension traps women in the visual mode as always other to the intentionality of perception, and the metaphysical dimension generally figures transcendence to and from a monosexed God.

Irigaray's criticisms may be summarised in two points:

1. She notes that Levinas opens the feminine in philosophy and yet still seems to 'write out' the feminine; 'the caress, that "fundamental disorder" does not touch the other'.(54) Perhaps we should recall Derrida's note here, to the effect that Levinas is explicitly writing as a man, and will not or cannot embrace the political dimension which Irigaray passionately seeks.(55)

2. Her second critical point is that we have not yet reached the safe haven where we can consider the age of onto-theological concerns from the moment of a post-modern approach to subjectivity and identity (including that of the notion of God); there are still areas of 'radical interrogation' which need to be addressed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FEMININE/MATERNAL AS NATURE

So far, the disruptive effects of a force codified as feminine has been explored in the context of philosophical-phenomenological accounts of the lived experience of the body. The disruptive effects of otherness have been strategically linked with 'the feminine' as negativity, and with the identity of Woman as Other in the dual marking of sexual difference. The ambiguity of these two aspects of 'the feminine' is taken up for a feminist perspective, to try and analyse this notion as the repressed or unspoken dimension of philosophy. Developing this ambiguity and attending to it constitutes an attempt to engender an 'ethics of sexual difference'.

In the following chapters, the strategic appropriation of otherness codified as feminine will be developed. If such a codification borrows from the marking of Woman as sexually specific, an additional aspect of this marking may be explored. This is the metaphoric link of otherness with the maternal. In Chapter Two, Kristeva's symbolic linking of the semiotic with the maternal was noted, and in Chapter Five, Irigaray's analysis of Merleau-Ponty's 'invisible' coincided with the maternal. I now intend to explore the maternal as another way of articulating the symbolic otherness in the context of philosophy.

As with 'the feminine', the maternal has an ambiguous character when understood symbolically; it is simultaneously the unbounded heterogeneity which threatens every stability, the 'void' of non-representation or the uncontainable processes of signification, or, it is the serene icon of

identity, the idealised perfection of Woman as Mother, or the woman as the 'maternal sex'. The ambiguity of these two characterisations is not to be resolved; rather, it is my intention to examine such ambiguity for its negative connotations (where the maternal appears as a foundational ground as Nature, and/or as an onto-theological Ideal). From a feminist perspective, these connotations act as repressive constrictions on the figuring of the feminine/maternal. In Irigaray and Kristeva's readings of philosophical/cultural texts, they critically identify the moments when the maternal is associated with an archaic past as 'the natural realm', origin and ground for existents, but then superseded to allow the emergence of existents as separate identities.(1) They also criticise the deifying of the maternal into an Ideal, as the 'fundamental fetish, phallus-substitute, support for all transcendental divinity' (2) as Kristeva puts it, or the projection onto the figure of the mother of ideal qualities, using this representation as a symbolic binding or repository for otherwise dangerous forces. This process may act to freeze women into this role, and also to deny them access to other possibilities of representation.

However, Kristeva and Irigaray also examine the maternal for its 'positive' connotations, whereby the maternal can appear as strategically disruptive, and/or as one possible aspect of specifically women's experience. This aspect of their work constitutes the attempt to revive or re-engage aspects of the maternal which have been occluded. In discussing this aspect of the maternal, I will raise the following questions: To what extent does identity rest upon the repressed and elided 'feminine' which can also be described as maternal? Can the character of the feminine/maternal be articulated in such a way as to avoid its repressive connotations, in order to present philosophy with a feminist perspective, and with a more

productive understanding of its own methodology?
The implication is that while Western metaphysics may possess a necessarily foundational character, the extent to which such foundational thinking is aligned and implicated with metaphors of the maternal may be further explored from a feminist perspective.

In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty writes: 'Do a psycho-analysis of Nature; it is the flesh, the mother'.(3)
The analysis of the philosophical conceptions of nature also indicate its elision with conceptions of the maternal. Levinas' thought bears witness to some of the ambivalences I outlined above, in that he wishes to separate his ethical thought and its associations with the feminine maternal, from the foundational aspects of Western metaphysics which he sees as totalising. And yet, there is an implicit realm of the 'natural' which also has implications for a feminist reading of his thought and also for any attempt to revalue the metaphor of maternity as ethics.

If it is the case that Levinas' work demonstrates a progression in the course of its development - not necessarily a revision of his earlier work, but certainly an intensification or elaboration of some points - then we need to establish the consequences of this progression.(4) This may be summarised as a shift from the language of Totality And Infinity which is perhaps bound by its preoccupation with phenomenology and ontology, to the more pressing ethical engagement of Otherwise Than Being. This move corresponds to a shift from a concern with the feminine and the erotic, to a development of the notion of maternity as vulnerability, suffering and passivity.

There are immediate and obvious objections to these notions which, it seems, rather than instigating the feminine into emancipated ethical relations, merely serve to bind it back even more firmly into the images and representations of long-suffering motherhood, the patient expectation of exploitation in the name of unconditional love. This accusation remains on the level of empirical representation, and does not tackle the very conditions and possibility of such representations, the means by which such equations are maintained. It is part of Levinas' project to give an account of these conditions. However, if Levinas' project is to be evaluated as an attempt to deal with the very structures of ontology and totalising thought which will continue to reproduce the equations of representation, we must retrace the steps of his thought which lead him to his characterisation of maternity as the fundamental ethical condition.

In Levinas' characterisation of the 'il y a' (there is)[5] certain questions concerning the origin, or emergence of the existent may be raised. For Levinas, the 'il y a' corresponds to being - supposedly not returned to absolute or total chaos - but being without differentiation. 'One cannot put this return to nothingness outside of all events. But what of the nothingness itself? Something would happen, if only night and the silence of nothingness'.[6]
The 'il y a' is a force field, it is a plethora of formlessness which is still something like sensorium, but without any possibility of distinguishing between the experiential forces.

> The indeterminateness of this 'something is happening' is not the indeterminateness of a subject and does not refer to a substantive...This impersonal, anonymous, yet indistinguishable 'consummation' of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself, we shall designate by the term <u>there is</u>.[7]

So the anonymity of the 'il y a' corresponds in some ways to Kristeva's realm of the semiotic, an initial signifying realm which is positioned prior to the emergence of the existent. '... the points of nocturnal space do not refer to each other as in illuminated space; there is no perspective, they are not situated. There is a swarming of points'.(8) Like the realm of pulsions in a provisional ordering in Kristeva's chora, 'it is full, but full of the nothingness of everything'.(9) In order to enter into exteriority and the possibility of ethics the existent must emerge from this realm of darkness.

The realm of the anonymous also corresponds to the metaphoric fluidity of the maternal realm, the mother who is the continuity of natural flux, an experiential profusion of forces; 'an ocean (la mer) which beats up against (being) on all sides'.(10) Kristeva characterises this process in a similar way: '...no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. "It happens but I'm not there". "I cannot realise it, but it goes on".(11) Despite its apparent positioning prior to the emergent existent, the positioning of such a realm is only conducted from a place already 'delivered' from it; there is no unmediated access to the 'il y a', but this does not mean that it is wholly inacessible. Rather, a dislocation between the time and space of the maternal and the placing of the existent in individuated time is effected. 'To be conscious is to be torn from the there is...';(12) 'Instead of serving as our means of access to being, nocturnal space delivers us over to being'.(13)

Topologies of the existent, its capacities to live and work, are engendered by its birth into a sensate realm. This is a realm of immediacy and

enjoyment, but it also begins the establishing of positionality, through separation and distinction, a certain relinquishing of indeterminacy. The world is a givenness to the existent which establishes the topography of inner/outer, work and the home interior and exterior etc. The theorisation of this process can be found in its various forms in Rousseau, Marx and Freud/Lacan, for example.(14) The process is both tragic in its loss of an origin and yet also establishes an awareness of the loss of origin for the existent. Levinas is seeking to instantiate ethics from the very commencement of his thought in this context.

As many critics indicate,(15) despite Levinas' attempt to distinguish his position from a Heideggerian ontology, it is by no means a straightforward separation. Although the relation beween Levinas and Heidegger cannot be dealt with in detail here, we can note a few key points.

Levinas characterises the experiential response to the 'il y a' as one of horror and repulsion, one which provokes a sense of existence not away from death, but from the endless continuity of being. Thus the existent is impelled into contact with distinctions and discriminating separation, not by the fear of an end to existence but by a fear of its never ending.

> ...nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens; this silence, this tranquility, this void of sensations constitutes a mute, absolutely indeterminate menace...The rustling of the there is... is horror.(16)

This is intended to act as a corrective to Heidegger's horizon of mortality,(17) which Levinas sees as provoking the existent into a solitudinous existence, and initiating the relation to being as a relation

of 'virility', and also to the generosity of the 'givenness' of Being, which Levinas thinks cannot explain why the separation of beings from Being should ever take place .

The experience of 'no exit' from being is, for Levinas, far more compelling than the horizon of death or a vibration of being as immersed enjoyment. Here we can note that the sense of being 'submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalised, stifled by it'[18] is given a different experiental approach than the bliss of unmediated jouissance which Kristeva and Irigaray characterise as the realm of ambiguous, undetermined being.[19] For Levinas, one is impelled away from this experience, towards the enjoyment engendered by separation. And yet, Levinas seeks enjoyment of the elemental, once separation is effected, as the possibility of ethics for the existent.

> Sensibility is not a blind reason and folly. To sense is precisely to be sincerely content with what is sensed, to enjoy, to refuse the unconscious prolongations, to be thoughtless, that is without ulterior motive (afterthought), unequivocal, to break with all the implications - to maintain oneself at home with oneself.[20]

This empathy of enjoyment is supposed to guard against the 'mastery' of domination which might be the outcome of thinking being as power. Such an approach would correspond to the uprooting and promotion of the human into its privileged position which goes on to desecrate that which is other. He locates the violence of totality and identity in a repulsion or 'allergy' to otherness. But his early characterisation of the 'il y a' is precisely one of an uncontrollable realm from which the existent emerges, such that enjoyment can come to be understood as such, and the emergence can only be a sense of relief in an escape from the suffocation of fear.

Levinas also wants to separate his position from the Heideggerian relation to the natural. He sees Heidegger's views on technology as a will to return to 'a pagan existence', 'a peasant rootedness', a philosophy of blood and soil which is 'a rule of power more inhuman than technology'.(21) Such an attempt to recollect the question of being in this form may be contra the onto-theology of Western thought and a critique of rationality, but for Levinas it is not only a disguised form of religious thinking but one which has politically suspect implications. Apart from being 'anti-Biblical', in Levinas' terms, it returns violence in a more virulent form and now in the name of 'mother earth'. In writing on Heidegger, he states:

> Being directs its building and cultivating, in the midst of a familiar landscape, on a maternal earth. Anonymous, neuter, it directs it, ethically indifferent, as heroic freedom, foreign to all guilt with regard to the other. Indeed, this earth maternity determines the whole Western civilisation of property, exploitation, political tyr ny and war.(22)

Levinas wishes to avoid the problematic relation to the natural as a version of paganism. He backs off from what he sees as the unacceptable forms of mysticism and the divine, but there is a danger that he is once again then drawing on a repulsion of the natural to found his righteous defence of the ethical. This time it is the anonymous 'il y a' which is to be mastered. He refuses the characterisation of consciousness of itself reacting against itself as bound within ontology, so there must be a givenness of otherness to found the existent. But the givenness which is sacrificed here is not inseparable from the maternal realm.

In this sense, we can note Levinas' debt to the notion of a birth from the primordial, from the constrictions and suffocations of a motherly touching

which is continuous and entwining, without a space of separation. The claustrophobic closeness of this intra-uterine dimension is nocturnal and terrifying, it conjures up the paralysis in which one is unable to breathe, so close that the amniotic fluid surrounds and liquifies all boundaries. And yet this is a form of breathing even in non-separation; the paradox of a symbolic undecidability concerning the boundaries of self and other. It is characterised as both separation and continuity.

But the gathering up of an existent in this respect cannot strictly speaking be described as a repression of the otherness of the 'il y a' or anonymity; it has to be there already in the existent. Since it has provoked or provided the very boundaries of the initial topography, such boundaries are already like a porous membrane which must allow the transmission of forces in, through and across them. The rupturing of a notion of 'before' and 'after' prevents a division of being into regions which correspond to pre-conscious and conscious. We might understand the porosity of beings as constantly intersected by the unruly equivocation which stops them from completion as essential and discrete identities.

> The incessant murmur of the there is strikes with absurdity the active transcendental ego, beginning and present. But the absurdity of the there is , as a modality of the one-for-the-other, signifies... In this overflowing of sense by nonsense, the sensibility, the self, is first brought out, in its bottomless passivity, as pure sensible point, a disinterestedness, or subversion of essence.(23)

In this sense, the 'signification' of this realm corresponds to Kristeva's suggestion that the semiotic can be understood as persisting through into the understandings of the symbolic. The archaic maternal jouissance is the condition for identity formation, but remains residually in such identity.

The residues of such forces subvert a humanist subject and prevent it from being essentialised. However, it seems that the renunciation of this realm in favour of the socio-symbolic positions it as irredeemably other. For Kristeva, it is through the signifying practices of art and religion that such forces find their expressivity, harnessed back into a means of representation which does not fully exhaust them.

> In returning, through the event of death, towards that which produces its break; in exporting semiotic motility across the border on which the symbolic is established, the artist sketches out a kind of second birth.(24)

In Kristeva's work it seems to be the avant-garde artist who provides the locus of the transformation of such forces, 'asocial' negativity constituting a revolutionary inscription of the fluid and heterogeneous realm into the socio-symbolic. For Kristeva, the feminist direction of this project is less explicit or perhaps, less revolutionary, since it is a project which rests upon the uniqueness of the individual's capacity to transform these forces. The question remains; how are the traces or residues of this realm to be called up or re-interpreted, in such a way that the maternal element is not just continually superseded?

It is difficult to determine if Levinas is wholly guilty of the elision of the maternal element, the suppression of otherness which he is concerned to avoid, or whether he is sufficiently aware of the dangers of repressing or colonising this symbolic otherness. Irigaray expresses her hesitation on this issue in her 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas' when she asks if Levinas is sufficiently attentive to the 'natural universe', or whether he locates otherness and ethicality in the realms of signification and the social, at

the expense of this realm.(25) Levinas' attempt to realise the maternal representationally will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Irigaray suggests it might be possible to identify two notions of birth in the Levinasian text; one which is the 'good' birth; the attempt to rethink sexual relations and the understandings of the body which could result in new approaches to these questions, the other is the wresting free of the dangerous paralysis of maternal suffocation in the endless continuity of being, at the expense of the natural realm, coded as maternal.
In her own work, there is a marked concern to examine the 'elemental', firstly as providing a reminder to philosophy of this under-explored 'pre-rational' world view, and secondly, to develop a vocabulary which might articulate this otherness. Irigaray writes: 'I wanted to go back to this natural material which makes up our bodies, in which our lives and environment are grounded; the flesh of the passions'.(26) In this sense, her 'elemental' texts deal with air, earth, water and fire, as a re-invention of the material origins of philosophical thinking and of sexual divisions, which is also symbol ically maternal.(27) This is to be a means of drawing attention to the hidden or silent debt owed to this realm.

> Does not being find its foundation in a sensible immediacy as yet unspoken? In a silence upon that which secretly nourishes thinking? The unspoken or inexpressible of a relation of man to nature which escapes his logos. Which gives (of) itself in the unnamed site where the organs' contribution to their meaning is gathered. A givenness which is re-projected into a world and its objects. Thus recreating the whole, and making of each one whole, and of the whole each one, without ever making the secret of this production apparent.(28)

For Levinas, femininity is located within the economy of totality, yet with a fundamental otherness. Levinas writes of 'atheism' being the fundamental

situation - it is the human condition to exist in enjoyment first, only to encounter otherness not as a shock from elsewhere, but as a gentleness, as a disturbance within the economy where work and labour already take place.[29] In this sense it is an immanent disruption, since this feminine mode of being is a gentle and harmonious internality, not one which comes to impinge from outside. We can also see Levinas' resistance to dualities in his characterisation of dwelling[30] - the notion of being at home does not stand in opposition to the public realm as it does in Hegel, the private sphere which must be subordinated to the public in order to keep it under control.[31] Rather, the home or habitation describes a situatedness which is already part of work and life. It is presupposed by these structures. So rather than present two spheres fundamentally at odds with each other in what they seek to achieve, Levinas is trying to establish peaceable relations - not subordinate to a fictitious unity of the state and a universality which is masculine in its universality, but a preservation of differences in the acknowledgement of immanent otherness.

The situation in the world as enjoyment is not, however, a complacent lapse into a comfortable disregard, but it does indicate Levinas' attempt to question the notion of anxiety which often accompanies situatedness.[32]

> The privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition and in this sense its commencement... Simultaneously without and within, (one) goes forth outside from an inwardness.[33]

Life in this sense is concerned with enjoyment and agreeableness, not negativity.[34] Thus the breach of interiority as a dimension is through 'the primordial phenomena of gentleness'.[35] In this way alterity is

already presented as a mode of welcome and peace, not as a violent confrontation. Levinas hopes to introduce a fundamental ethicality, simultaneous to but not collapsed into the revelation of the Other. Levinas is explicit that such a moment is feminine.

> In founding the intimacy of the home the idea of infinity provokes separation not by some force of opposition and dialectical evocation, but by the feminine grace of its radiance.(36)

So Levinas suggests instead of the virility of totality and the violence he identifies in dualistic oppositions, the gentleness of an alterity already implicit, coded with femininity. And rather than aligning the feminine with death and negativity, it is here used to invoke a different mode of relations, ones concerned with love and the erotic. But this is not merely figured as a safe haven of calmness, since the feminine is also the dimension of absence, withdrawal and alterity; in other words, of transcendence. This relation is both intimacy and an immediate welcome, but also a 'lapse in being', - a non-present otherness, 'the very essence of discretion... the presence of the Other must not only be revealed in the face which breaks through its own plastic image but must be revealed, simultaneously, with this presence, in its withdrawal and absence'.(37)

Femininity, thus figured, is meant to play havoc with the structures of intentionality and identity. On the one hand, it is not supposed to be reducible to Woman in the home, since it disturbs even the domesticity of this arrangement with the strangeness that the 'feminine-as-other' announces. In this sense, Levinas uses the symbolism of femininity as gentleness and a welcome in the home (a risky undertaking) in the familiar equation of comfort and ease with the world. The hints of the maternal

metaphor as homely care is also lingering around this account of dwelling. But he seeks to overload the metaphoric structure in such a way as to exceed its constraints. However, in that femininity is the encounter with the other in difference, it indicates a) that Levinas is still entranced by a structure of intentionality in casting the feminine as 'the threshold of the real', objectifying her as phenomenal, and b) if the feminine is that which already at home in the dwelling, an existing equation of ethicality, domesticity and femininity seems to be reinforced. This creates a problem for women's relation to this equation. If she is that mode of signification, in order to encounter it as her other she must either become masculine (as the one to be addressed or commanded by the other who is not the same as her), or else be able to separate herself from the feminine in order to be able to encounter this dimension of alterity.

To put it in Irigaray's terms, if the feminine is providing a dwelling for man, she lacks a home for herself and must be in effect 'homeless'. She lacks a way of coming and going, to and from, for herself.

> That house of language which for men goes so far as to supply his dwelling in a body...woman is used to construct it, but, then, it is not available to her.(38)

Irigaray suggests that if women are to find a way of 'dwelling' in language they cannot wholly live in the role of 'philosopher's wife'. They have to recognise the extent to which something is kept in reserve in that role, always 'elsewhere', and yet only emerging through the mimicry of such a role.

> To go back inside the philosopher's house requires, too, that she be able to fulfill the role of matter - mother or sister...(39)

Irigaray suggests the 'nomadic' element of the feminine as 'outside' the house of language and dwelling, be brought into conjunction with the 'furnishing' role of the feminine/maternal as it provides such a dwelling, to expose the equivocal relation of these two metaphors. For Irigaray, such a conjunction provokes a rethinking of such equations, but for her this rethinking is an explicitly feminist project rather than a generally ethical one. 'For (Levinas), the feminine does not stand for an other to be respected in her human freedom and human identity. The feminine other is left without her own specific face. On this point, his philosophy falls radically short of ethics.'(40)

In the previous chapters, the attempts to characterise the feminine/maternal within the context of phenomenology has been examined. The radicality of this approach presents certain feminist potentials, in that a non-totalising and descriptive methodology is a challenge to metaphysics, and so to the emergence of existents as essences or essentialised identities. However, it also seems to present a problematic failure to account for the feminine/maternal adequately, in returning to the mimetic structures of representation as visibility, or to an unacknowledged reliance upon a feminine/maternal realm as foundational. Whether this notion is given the figuring of 'the natural' or 'the dwelling', the phenomenological framework seems bound to reinscribe the feminine/maternal in dangerous ways. Although Kristeva and Irigaray seem open to this charge as well, what would mark a specifically feminist direction to this project would be a more insistent vigilance to the appearance and discussion of such notions in the philosophical context.

In her 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', Irigaray identifies 'two levels' to Levinas' discourse. The first is the appropriation of the phenomenological approach, 'in particular through the caress, to the carnal relation, to the alterity of the feminine, to the unseen of the flesh', which constitutes a challenge to metaphysics. However, this seems in danger of falling back into 'the boundaries staked out by the philosophical constitution of the masculine subject...it is submerged in animality, perversity, childhood (which/whose?) of which the feminine is the condition of representation.' For Irigaray this amounts to the abandonment of the feminine other, which 'leaves her to sink, in particular into the darkness of a pseudoanimality'.[(41)] We have examined this charge in the context of Levinas' writing on the level of the elemental.

The second 'level' in Levinas' work is the Other on a metaphysical or theological level. For Irigaray, the aspect of the texts 'belongs to the imperatives of the metaphysical tradition', the revelatory aspect of the other. She notes that 'Levinas (usually intentionally) fails to distinguish between the foundations of philosophy and the foundations of theology'. In the next chapter, I will explore the implications of a 'divine' in the context of Levinas' ethical philosophy, and further examine its implications for a feminist perspective.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE FEMININE/MATERNAL AS DIVINE

In the following chapter the conception of the feminine/maternal as divine will be discussed. In the first instance, this can be read as a divinisation of the feminine/maternal as Ideal, the perfection of Woman as Other into Woman/Mother. Critical analyses of the socio-symbolic representations of 'divine' motherhood which correspond to this notion point out its negative connotations. In this sense it is restrictive for women, corresponding to the projection of 'desirable' ethical qualities of patience and nurturance onto the symbolic figuring of the mother. Whether such totalising representations are found in religious discourse or in secular variations, they are intended to act as ethical ideals, and hence as founding principles, but seem to re-fix women as other and to establish impossible paradigms.

Nevertheless, it is clear that because feminist thinking is still concerned with ideals, with ethics, and with seeking more productive versions of representation, it is still implicated in the structures of metaphysics, and in seeking the 'other' woman who may come to exist in the future. If, as Irigaray, Kristeva and Levinas suggest, there is an 'other', more obscure or darker region to philosophy and to ethical thinking, it cannot be 'seen' clearly in the terms of representation, presence and truth, but yet it can perhaps voiced or exposed in a way which acknowledges the unpaid debt which is owed to it. One version of this obscure region is the 'matière première' or 'mother-matter',(1) the unevoked ground of metaphysics as the maternal/feminine. As I suggested in the previous

chapter, the foundational aspect of ethical thinking may be inescapable, but it will still be important in this context to re-examine the characterisation of such foundations or ideals, and the very means by which their construction or revelation takes place. This is particularly pressing, in the context of this study, when the 'hidden' element coincides with the maternal/feminine. However, if the processes by which such constructions take place are left unexamined, not only will the repetitive and destructive circuits be repeated, but such processes may reappear anyway in the feminist positions which attempt to challenge them. The processes will appear as feminist attempts to articulate new forms of subjectivity and more fruitful ideals to aim for, or as the mysticism of female Goddesses, for example, as ideal symbols, when such symbols are taken to signal a wholly alternative mode of signification for women.(2) The problem here is how to articulate such expression if it has already been shown to be 'elsewhere' to the systems of signification. An approach may be suggested as follows:

1. A critique of the onto-theological nature of metaphysical thinking, when the notion of the subject and the divine are articulated in terms of presence. From a feminist perspective, this means a critical examination of representations of the divine which are restrictive for women and for the 'feminine/maternal' otherness we have identified. Such notions may be restrictive either in deifying Woman or in denying their reliance upon the symbolic feminine/maternal as the hidden ground of their structures.

2. An acknowledgement that in order to think the problematics of ethics,

some way of articulating possible alternatives is required. This seems to demand a version of a ground, space or realm from which to reveal such alternatives. The key issue is the way that such a notion is understood. For a feminist philosopher, such a notion seems to suggest the effaced 'other' of the maternal/feminine, the possibility of a lost or as-yet-not-existing realm of 'dark' meanings and the 'mother-matter' of archaic origins.(3)

3. An attempt to rethink this notion in a way that negotiates the restrictions of previous ways of thinking and opens up more fruitful potentials. This moment of 'exposure' or revelation is already compromised by the initial critique of such structures, and so must be expressed indirectly, in mimicry, irony, poetically or obscurely. Such strategies will draw attention to their own strategic positioning.

In what follows, I intend to examine Irigaray and Levinas' attempts to bring to light the obscure or hidden otherness of a different 'form of truth'. The revelation of such hiddenness corresponds to a Heideggerian revealing-as-concealing, and indeed it is Heidegger who is the shadowy figure who lies in the background for both Levinas and Irigaray in this context.(4) However, for both Levinas and Irigaray, it is not the neutrality of Being which is at stake in this unveiling, but a maternal conception of unlimited jouissance, equivalent to the semiotic space, or the fluid heterogeneity of the feminine/maternal, a dark and divided notion of truth to be 'revealed'.

This strategic positioning of the feminine/maternal is a deliberate attempt to intervene in the philosophical occlusion of sexual difference. While

Heidegger's notion of Being as obscure absence and the project of re-thinking such a notion corresponds to Irigaray and Levinas' thinking to some extent, they seek to once again re-mark this approach in an immanent and sexualised mode.(5)

In orthodox versions of Christianity, the name of God is seen to be tied up with wholeness and presence.(6) This characterisation of the divine is entwined with a particular notion of perfection and existence which belongs to a specific Western tradition, coinciding with the versions of subjectivity and being which have been brought into question in previous chapters of this study.

The fact that such static or unified notions of subjectivity are representations of unquestionable presence can also be seen in the parallel perfections of God as supreme and ineffable being, and Woman as ideal icon of subjectivity. The phantasmic projection of oneness, perfect unity, places Woman and God in a parallel structure of idealisation, raised to the status of absolute purity. The place occupied by both in such a structure is as something 'outside' or beyond the speakable. The unspeakable perfection of the eternal origin guarantees the conditions and possibility of speech at all, and yet at the price of silence. God is absent, withdrawn or excluded, as is the ideal Woman, (The) Woman, such that the space of desire can take place. In such conditions, a space of metaphysical, ardent desire which can never defile its target is set up. In <u>This Sex</u> Irigaray writes;

> ... does not that ineffable ecstatic pleasure take the place for men of a Supreme Being, whom they need but who ultimately eludes their

knowledge. Does it not occupy - for them - the role of God? With the requirement - for them - that it be discreet enough not to disturb them in the logic of their desire.

For God has to be there so that subjects may speak, or rather speak about him. But "He" has, for "His" part, nothing to say on this subject/to these subjects. It is up to men to enact his laws. And to subject him, in particular, to their ethic.(7)

Here she suggests God acts as a narcissistic perfecting and projection of the subject in the masculine, a God of man who keeps silent - withdraws - such that ethics can be formulated. As part of the formulations of the concerns of Western metaphysics, the formulations of God are in keeping with the masculine bias she has identified. This also applies to the aspects of religious discourse which touch upon the ethical. Ethics in and through God makes a place for man.

Equally, the ideal Woman occupies a negative site of origin as the transcendental mother figure and as 'excess'; the otherness of feminine jouissance. But the price to be paid here is a sacrifice of access to otherness, since such formulations are at the cost of one of the elements, notably the feminine/maternal.

There is nothing to be desired about being the term of the other. This paralyses us in our becoming. Divinity and goddess for and of man - we are deprived of our goals and paths.(8)

But while she is critical of the structure of this idealising metaphysical desire, (in the sense that it projects an ideal), Irigaray also recognises its necessity for the development of future feminine subjects. 'It is indispensable for us to be God <u>for us</u>, so that we can be divine for the other'.(9)

This will involve reading religious aspirations as originating in the human, in anthopologising religion in order to question its necessity, or re-locating such aspirations back in a material realm. This approach is intended to problematise the divisions of carnal/spiritual and of masculine/feminine. It corresponds to the historicising of that which is seen to be a timeless ideal, in order to divest it of any eternal fixity and give it a relativism which will also be to open it up to futural change. God has been 'made' in one sense - the articulation of alterity has taken cultural shape as the Father and Son, with the relationship of the Holy Spirit between them. This articulation has specific conditions, as Irigaray, following Feuerbach, indicates.(10) God acts as a perfecting element for man, man withdrawn from the world into a concentrated abstraction, a concentrated accomplishment of aspirations. As we have seen, the Virgin Mary is coded as a cipher through which the divine spirit may pass, and in her very instantiation as mother is reduced to an icon of stasis, mother of suffering and self-denying love. Any dynamism she might present on her own terms is covered over in such representations.
The strength of giving a history of this conceptual progression is to indicate its roots in the human. It points to a materialist understanding of religious concepts, by showing their relation to the conditions and determinations of their time, and so provides the grounds for a critique of such a metanarrative, showing it to be contingent.(11)

But by this critique Feuerbach does not intend to abolish religion, but rather to understand and so improve it. Religion is, for Feuerbach ' a relation based on the affections which until now has sought its truth in a fantastic reflection of reality'.(12) For Feuerbach, sex love will become

the material realisation of this relation, and it is through religion that these relations will come to their fullest realisation, in accordance with the etymological connotation of the word religare, a bond.[13] In other words, the love relation between the sexes, more productively idealised, will reflect down again and make the bonding of humanity even stronger. This is Feuerbach's hope for the effect which a consciously directed spiritual dimension can produce. By intervening on the mechanisms of perfection, we could produce the kinds of gods we most desire. This corresponds to Irigaray's project of problematising the divisions of spiritual/carnal, to illustrate such divisions as destructive, and then attempting to develop an ethics of the passions. For Irigaray, a similar process might be employed in the understanding of sexual difference.

But Engels and Marx's criticisms of Feuerbach are timely in this context, in that they point out the essentialised and de-historicized notion of the human this produces.[14] Desire and spirituality are an unquestioned pre-condition of the human element; a certain self-consciousness which can cognise its own teleology, independently of history. Feuerbach wants the sensuous material form but abstracts an idealised content - a human essence. This is what makes revolutionary upsurges in representations possible, but it will fail to alter the very conditions of representation unless it is able to recognise their contingency too. The framework is to be brought into radical doubt just as much as the content of its productions.

Irigaray shows that she is aware of this problem of essentialising or de-historicising desire. Rather than rely upon the existing framework of

representation and the mimetic structures of consciousness, Irigaray has recourse to an 'indirect' means of revealing this concealed aspect of the divine, which also draws attention to its own strategic (mis)-representations. She is not just arguing that women need access to a feminine kind of divine too, in order to balance out the injustice of excluding (for example) goddesses, witches, priestesses etc. This argument for balance seems to be equalising; there could be a whole plurality of possible gods and goddesses in this fluid conception of the divine. But it could be in danger of falling into a form of reconcil iation which covers over those fundamental disparities, faults and fissures in subjectivity which her careful use of psychoanalysis has provided. In arguing that the 'creation' of a divine for women might be possible, we have to avoid construing such a process as self-conscious and involving a rational, objective assessment of the requirements of feminist futures. This would be to pre-empt the very openness which the divine is to maintain, the horizon of non-completion, and to fill in, in its place, a deterministic narrative. It is also to fall back into the patterns of metaphysics already problematised.

Instead, Irigaray has recourse to the 'figuring' of Woman as the non-figurable, the incomplete form of otherness as undecidable, neither one nor the other. This takes different forms in her work; the mother, jouissance, the female sex organs, etc.(15) Irigaray constantly refers to the morphological body as a social/historical construction, which she sees as part of the social imaginary - the whole realm of social relations which may turn out to be just as prey to delusion and paranoias. What appear to be 'essentialised' components of her thinking are intended as strategic

hypercritical devices, adopted to act as material interventions on the ideological production of meaning. In order to consider if she negotiates this problem we should look at her tentative outlines for the creation of a feminine genre in the divine.

What she suggests is that if the site of religion has been 'made' in one way then perhaps it can be 'made' again - 'theology in the feminine' would seek to articulate relations between mothers and daughters perhaps.

> Our theological tradition presents a serious difficulty when it comes to God in the feminine. Woman becomes divine through her son. There is no woman God. No feminine trinity; mother, daughter, spirit.(16)

She indicates an interrogation of this parallel idealisation might begin a search for 'the "elsewhere" of feminine pleasure, (which) might be sought in the place where it sustains ek-stasy in the transcendental, the place where it serves as security for a narcissism extrapolated into the "God" of men'.(17)

Significantly, the place where a God in the feminine might be realised is insistently left open in her work. She suggests it is up to women to realise feminine divine alterity for themselves, to work out what such a space or mythology might mean. Her refusal to elucidate on this question is partly a refusal to speak on others' behalf (to speak as a man). It is also to leave such a revealing open-ended, incomplete and uncertain.

But she does indicate it is not meant to be a repetition of what has gone before, nor necessarily a female deity/deities. We are not being induced to 'continue a process of deification on the pattern of our ancestors and their totem animals...(to) make a regression back to the siren

goddesses...'[18] She adds:

> There is no great advantage in resisting the man-woman hierarchy, woman-State, a certain woman-God or woman-machine, only to fall back under the power of nature-woman, animal-woman even matriarch-woman or women-women.[19]

So she is proposing yet another act of mimicry; this time to play upon the equation of God and the feminine for its radical and mysterious dimension. Both Lacan and Levinas identify the dimension of the feminine/maternal with a certain dimension of the divine, but neither do so with any of the urgency of Irigaray's politically motivated texts.[20] I suggest she recognises that the divine must be relativised to allow women their own relation to the divine in the feminine. This will open up potential and various feminine version of deities, perhaps, mothers and daughters. But this process must itself be intersected by a conception of the divine as the very possibility of difference itself, to stop such creativity merely replicating the myth of masculine self-construction, the same. In other words, to maintain the dimensions of openness and non-completion, any self-realisation (even of the feminine) must be interrupted from a teleological humanism by a dimension more radically other, itself already interrupted.

Lacan resists the identification of the Other with God, since the implied objectification of this move (making God a proper name) seems to freeze the escaping irreducibility he wishes to maintain, turning it into an Other 'remarkably like the good old God of all times'.[21] Lacan has indicated a theorisation of otherness other to the totalising moves of identity as positive. We have already seen the fissuring of a self-present subject by

excess, pure self-consciousness interrupted by the residues of desire and difference. Such radical otherness is not reduced to the Same.

Might this irreducible and radical heteronomy also characterise the divine? Lacan states his resistance to the myth of the death of God does not imply a return to the old theology. For Lacan, 'God is not dead but unconscious'.(22) The unconscious acts as a force of negativity, other to itself. The unconscious - of course also symbolically feminine - returns to haunt the margins. If there is no 'true' meaning to this force or process, no single representation, perhaps there is an infinite displacement of possible meanings - not a certain kind of representation, but not unrepresentable either. In addition, this version of the divine is established as material, partaking of the embodied existence of the beings which establish it.

The potential of a certain retrieval and revealing-concealing of this version of the divine for the feminine would be radical and heretical, dissenting from orthodox notions of God and the subject as masculine. In Kristeva and Irigaray's texts, in their notions of love, affectivity and the caress, this heretical ethics is opened in feminist directions.

Irigaray opens her article 'Women, the sacred and money' by declaring

> 'The exclusion or suppression of the religious dimension seems to be impossible. It reemerges in various and frequently degraded guises; sectarianism, religiosity...We do however, need to rethink the religious question, particularly its scope, its categories and its utopias, all of which have been male for centuries and remain so'.(23)

This concern with religious discourses may be contextualised in the general excavation and exploration of theological/symbolic formations. For example, Kristeva's consideration of the representations of maternity and the figure of the Virgin Mary, as well as her work on religious discourse and mystics as part of a process of idealisation in Tales of Love, correspond to cultural critiques of religious representations. Irigaray's own discussion of religious figurations ranges from 'La Mystérique' in Speculum of the Other Woman, ('la mystérique' being a semantically condensed term fusing the feminine gender with notions of mystic, hysteric and mystery to imply a spiritual site of meaning in the feminine); various references to aspects of divine otherness in This Sex Which is not One; her 1986 essay Divine Women, her work on Levinas, and a paper in 1990 entitled 'Spiritual Love; passion and civility' submitted to the 'Speculations' conference at the Freud Museum.(24)

Significantly, in these feminist explorations religious discourse is not viewed simply as another manifestation of phallocentric domination, a set of masculine practices with a male God, in complicity with male-dominated philosophy. Rather, religious discourse is significant for Irigaray and Kristeva in that it uniquely testifies, for them, the price paid in submitting to the symbolic order - both celebrating and constraining the moment of submission. Socially venerated as the sacred, religious discourse occupies a prime site of cultural significance and orthodoxy. Yet it is also the place where ecstatic spirituality is validated and theorised, a moment in the symbolic regime of order and hierarchy where order breaks into love or faith which potentially threatens to undermine

that order, even when reconscripted back into central symbolic icons (for example, mystic saints or the Virgin Mary).

Kristeva characterises this moment as;

> The sacrifice of one's identity in the delight of being swept away by passion and so not to exist...to be for the other, to be lost...to be transformed. A risk of death which is also a chance of life.[25]

At the edges where meaning threatens to break down, religious discourse recodes certain forces, to try and ensure their limitation and control, but always at the risk of a residue, an irreducible excess. Such an excess, which persistently escapes codification, might present the means of a more appropriate fulfillment of identities, the sexualisation of discourse and the acknowledgement of the other.

As well as marking certain sites of excess, religious discourses also give insights into the processes of idealisation and love or desire. As Kristeva and Irigaray note, such processes are those of self-realisation in a different mode, remaining material but transforming or re-interpreting the sense of self. This process of irradiation of the self is fiery and ecstatic, as for the female mystics, but it is also a darkly reflective process of distorting mirrors.

Neither God nor the subject are perhaps the most suitable places to begin to work on a 'feminine genre' for women, but these are the resources available. Can we trust the distorted reflections which are thrown off these mirrors to provide new means of representing for the feminine? The

image of the burning mirror from St. Theresa, which Irigaray uses for the figure of 'la mystérique', suggests a certain refusal to give back the kind of reflection which would mirror exactly, a refusal to dutifully reflect - in a secondary role, whether secondary to God or to the (masculine) subject. It is not wholly on this side of the mirror with 'real' selves and identities that this new means is to be found, nor on the other side of the mirror, the far side, where there is the self-sufficient infinite of the God of men. It demands a 'crossing back through the mirror, and an unsettling one'.(26)

> This silvering at the back of the mirror might, at least, retain the being (l'être)- which we have been perhaps and which perhaps will be again - though our mirage has failed at present or has been covered over by alien speculations... A burning glass is the soul (feminine gender in Fr.) who in her cave joins with the source of light to set everything ablaze that approaches her hearth...(27)

A feminist perspective on this process is, she writes, 'not a luxury but a necessity'. Here she implies a serious evaluation of radical otherness indicated in her understanding of sexual difference, but also the importance of an encounter with absolute alterity expressed by the divine. What is striking about her work in this area is her understanding of the infinite (an uncompleted time-space or space-time) as that which makes possible a radical alterity. It is understanding the radical nature of this alterity which opens up the possibility of a feminine subjectivity and a feminist ethics. For Irigaray, the horizon of the divine is the only means by which such notions can be broached with sufficient profundity to bring about the transformations she hopes for.

To have a will, it is indispensable to have a goal. The most valuable of which is to become. Infinitely. To become it is necessary to have an essence or genre (henceforth gendered) as a horizon...
Man can exist because God helps him to define his genre, to situate himself as a finite being in relation to the infinite. To set up a genre, a God is needed: a guarantee of the infinite ('une caution de l'infini'; a possibility of infinity, and of non-completion or closure).
There has never been a construction of subjectivity or of any human society which has been worked through without the help of the divine...Only a God can constitute a place of coming together which can leave us free.'(28)

What she is not concerned with is a more straightforwardly Christian feminist perspective which might argue for women's equal access to God or campaign for women priests. Nor is she advocating a mystical and essential female God or Goddess. Such perspectives do not engage sufficiently with the framework which bring them about. Nevertheless, she has gradually expanded upon her interrogation of the philosophical/theological exclusion of the feminine element, towards developing her notions of what a feminine genre might mean - a creative enactment of a hypothetical space for women to have a place of their own, otherwise to the neutrality of Being and yet also enabling sexual difference to engage in a more harmonious dialogue, to the benefit of both men and women. This attempt to go beyond critique is a risky undertaking, but expresses her commitment to positive change in terms of sexual relations and a reassessment of a spiritual dimension.

Thus the encounter with the divine is an encounter with absolute otherness, and with excess, which throws into question the constituted identity of a subject as homogeneous and autonomous. Indebted to the horizon which provides the means to create limits, the indebtedness simultaneously provides future transformational potentials which would not seek to control or deny excess, and particularly the excess which is coded as feminine. If

women are to play more than an instrumental role in this relation, the process of reconceptualising this symbolisation demands that - strategically or hypothetically - gender must impinge, intrude in any discussion of alterity and otherness. For Irigaray, this process demands the unveiling or unconcealing of the dark and hidden aspect of the divine as the maternal/feminine.

We can see a similar process in Levinas' work. In his earlier analysis which focussed on the erotic, Levinas elaborated two aspects of the feminine, namely voluptuosity and fecundity, which occur together in the relation 'beyond the face'.(29) Voluptuosity is the excess of enjoyment which can be found in the sensible realm, a provocation to phenomenological encounter with the other, not as object but as the uncontainable dissipation of the erotic, and this cannot be a falling back into the self qua subject, because it is already shot through with excess, overwhelming with pleasure and yet never wholly fulfilling as an essence.
In fecundity the possibility of transcendence is suggested, a possibility which opens the structure of eros on to a creative and productive relation, anticipating a dimension which is 'future, but never future enough'. It is not supposed to be confined to a biological fecundity - Levinas is insistent about this - but a fertility concerning potential. For Levinas, it is fecundity which presents us with the possibility of 'a new ontological principle'.(30) Fecundity is dynamic in that it propels and also disrupts the futural projection. It corresponds to the structures of desire which can be characterised as both erotic and metaphysical, that is, it would correspond to a dynamism to and from a physical body as well as an

ideal, mutually implicated, as in Irigaray's 'ethic of the passions'. For Levinas, a Freudian analysis of desire obscures the metaphysical dimension of desire as transcendence in seeking a material/biological account, which it takes to constitute a 'real' at some level. This gives the structure a deterministic tendency. Levinas recognises in the absence and withdrawal of transcendence in the erotic realm the possibility of opening the structure of this relation.

> ...with Freud, sexuality is approached on the human plane, it is reduced to the level of the search for pleasure, without the ontological signification of voluptuosity and the irreducible categories it brings into play being taken into account...What remains unrecognised is that the erotic, analysed as fecundity, breaks up reality into relations irreducible to the relations of genus and species, part and whole, action and passion, truth and error...(31)

A Lacanian approach to desire coresponds more to Levinas' perspective, in shifting difference to the signifying structures which are themselves constantly under revision. The structure of the subject is no longer fixed but shown to be broken up not only by the excesses of desire, but that excess is to be comprehended in signification. Heterogeneity always refers the subject elsewhere and cannot get back to a fundamental element, whether that is libidinal forces or the transcendental signifier.

> I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think.(32)

Levinas agrees with the aspect of anti-humanist thinking which causes doubt to the self-confidence of rationalising and totalising thinking. 'Psychoanalysis attests to the instability and fallacious character of the coincidence with oneself in the cogito...'(33) But he rejects the

consequences of either having recourse to a rigid structuralist view of signification as establishing fixed positions in language or the alternative of relativism, another abdication of responsibility amounting to another form of indifference towards difference.

Levinas acknowledges the importance of signification, but also seeks a deeper level of understanding of difference as responsibility. In order to do this, he elaborates alterity in terms of the trace and of maternity.

After Totality and Infinity, Levinas acknowledges that otherness cannot merely be the withdrawal of the feminine in the erotic, even if it is almost ungraspable in the 'clandestinity' of the caress and 'transubstantiated' in fecundity.(34) To characterise it as such still places it within the grasp of the epistemological subject, still with an eye to what can be known. Levinas realises that he must 'go back', or rather, intensify the excessive dimension of otherness, to make it even more excessive, if it is to resist the tendrils of phenomenology and metaphysics in its ethical claims. Here is the paradox; to make otherness more profoundly affecting, to make its impact even more traumatic for the interstices of subjectivity, it must be even more surpassing and excessive, even more other.

Levinas seeks this possibility for ethics in a past which will be an 'immemorial and unrecuperable diachrony', in order to orient towards a different kind of future. As Richard Cohen writes; 'The radical future of Levinas's earlier works will require the radical past of his later works'. (35) This notion will be a disclosure of that which remains always in elusive self-disappearance; the very condition of meaning which can mean only by being excessive to origin and telos.

Levinas is clear that this notion is not just a site of philosophy's inadequacy, the otherness of the Hebraic to the Hellenic, or the experiential immediacy which is other to theory. It is also symbolically linked to the maternal realm, figured once more as that which divulges and gives on to the 'unspeakable' and 'unrepresentable'. But for Levinas there is a prior ethicality connoted by this disclosure of absence. The most other that Levinas can find, more exterior than even the light and shadow face with its erotic equivocation, is not only more withdrawn, but is an otherness founded, intersected and scissioned by the good, or responsibility.

As Levinas characterises it, this otherness is a state of exposure, where the disorientation of time and selfhood is effected as an extreme vulnerability. To be so exposed in this way, a divesting of the last scraps of selfhood in the dislocating vortices of alterity, is for Levinas construed as a positivity. The loss of autonomy and any recovery is the undergoing of an excessive exposure to ethics. Levinas seeks to make this more radical than either being obliterated by the force of otherness, a negating of any self, or 'a generosity of offering oneself', which would presuppose a structure of self to offer and the cognisance of what it is to be generous. Levinas writes of 'a tearing from oneself despite oneself'.(36) In this state of exposure, Levinas locates a more radical, because more open, dimension of otherness, even to the very point of being a hostage to otherness. This is what it would mean to 'respond with responsibility; me, that is , here I am for the others, to lose one's place radically, or one's shelter in being...'.(37)

The 'passivity of inertia' as indifference would merely let difference pass by. Levinas wants to initiate the kind of response which goes beyond even Descartes' passion of 'admiration' (wonder) for that which is other. Levinas suggests, if we can phrase it thus, 'an inversion of the conatus of esse'; a fundamental unsettling of the being which strives or persists in its being, to the extent that passivity becomes an excess. It is 'to have the other within one's skin',(38) a direct incarnality.

The language of suffering appears at its most violent forms in this section of Otherwise Than Being:

> The passivity of wounds, the haemorrhage of the for-the-other, is a tearing away of the mouthful of bread...one's own mouthful of bread. It is an attack made immediately on the plenitude of the complacency in oneself (the complacency of complacency), on the identity in enjoyment...(39)

but it is also 'reverts from grasping to being grasped, as in the ambiguity of a kiss'.(40) Levinas tries to sustain the 'knot of corporeality' as the locale of this tumult. Thus he is driven to identify the extremities of involvement and responsibility for the other. It cannot be a calculated gift of the self, but nor can it be the willing obliteration of self in masochism. Both these structures assume a self and an other already in place. In Levinas's formulation there can be no 'cause' to be subjected to; he seeks to find a suffering or exposure to the other beyond or before any name for which one could suffer. To suffer for a cause would be a domestication of the suffering, suffered 'in the name of', which is to say, that which is already named and known.

> Sensibility is being affected by a non-phenomenon, a being put into question by the alterity of the other, before the intervention of a cause, before the appearing of the other.(41)

The 'non-initiative' of the sensibility which is an unlimited giving is 'older than any present, and is not a passivity contemporaneous with and counterpart of an act. It is the hitherside of the free and the not free, the an-archy of the Good'.(42)

This structure of ethicality lies on the 'hitherside' of the determinism which might suppose an inevitability to suffering (like a Leibnizian 'best of all possible worlds'), but also other to a freely chosen suffering, since it is not a question of will and agency. Levinas attempts to take passivity 'back' to another order of time entirely, more disruptive in being extra-ordinary. In the process of seeking this order of time, he is led to activate a notion of maternity as the very spirit of the 'passivity of passivity'.(43)

> It is a writhing in the tight dimensions of pain, the unexpected dimensions of the hither side. It is being torn up from oneself, being less than nothing, a rejection into the negative, behind nothingness; it is maternity, gestation of the other in the same. Is not the restlessness of someone persecuted but a modification of maternity, the groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has borne? In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for the others...
> Rather than a nature, earlier than nature, immediacy is this vulnerability, this maternity, this pre-birth or pre-nature in which the sensibility belongs.(44)

This vulnerability is not merely weakness but an intensity characterised by an obsessive quality, but not as the kind of obsession which can be 'owned', as it is figured antecedently to 'representation or consciousness of proximity'. Levinas connects this prior vulnerability to an unconstrained expression of mercy, felt as deeply as a bodily empathy for the other. He writes;

> we are thinking of the Biblical term **Rakhamin**, which is translated as mercy, but contains a reference to the word **Rekhem**; uterus: it is a mercy that is like an emotion of the maternal entrails.(45)

In writing of this 'groaning of the entrails', a physical undergoing is evoked. But for Levinas it is also linked to a notion of the divine. Levinas derives this connection from Jeremiah 31:20, where it is expressed as God's extreme suffering and mercy.(46) But this is not the orthodox conception of God, but, as I suggested in earlier part of this chapter, seems to correspond to the mysterious otherness of the feminine/maternal. But Levinas does not explore this possibility in depth, reverting eleswhere in his texts to the (masculine) God of monotheism. This God may be absent and obscured, but is clearly the absent (patriarchal) Father.

Maternity is also 'other' to the erotic and its hints of specular/ ocular connotations. In maternity Levinas tries to find a means of characterising the touch which is wholly proximate, with no implications of sight, and a way of accounting for responsibility which even precedes any encounter.

> ...goodness emerges as the responsibility of the subject which has always already been responsible, prior to any explicit agreements, prior, even to the subject's ability to welcome the Other'.(47)

This non-thematised proximity is maternal thus in two senses i) it is symbolically touch before sight ii) it is responsibility before agency. ('Before' in this context indicating both 'prior to' and 'having priority', but other than chronologically, because it is meant to negotiate the ordering of time as sequential moments). It is explictly a sensible or corporeal undergoing; that is, it cannot remain on a symbolic level of suffering. ('The body is not only an image or a figure here; it is the

distinctive in-onaself of the contraction of ipseity and its breakup'(48) and note following: 'The body is neither an obstacle opposed to the soul, nor a tomb that imprisons it, but that by which the self is susceptibility itself. Incarnation is extreme passivity; to be exposed to sickness, suffering, death, is to be exposed to compassion, and, as a self, to the gift that costs...It is the correlate of a persecution, a substitution for the other.')(49)

> Sensible experience as an obsession by the other, or a maternity, is already the corporeality which the philosophy of consciousness wants to constitute on the basis of it. The corporeality of one's own body signifies, as sensibility itself, a knot or denouement of being...(50)

If maternity is not to function as a metaphor for suffering and extreme responsibility, then it must refer to the otherwise silent figuration of the feminine/maternal haunting the text, that which only appears as 'other'. But Levinas does not clarify if maternity forms a kind of role model for responsibility, or how this is to be activated. In this sense his text lacks the re-application of his analysis of the corporeal body and sensibility back to the lived experience of those who read and might learn from it.

Does this lead us to suspect that passivity and proximity are still based perhaps on an economy of sacrifice? An essential possibility of being wholly for the other in a surrender which can make a space for ethics, but still at the expense of the other/mother. The question now is whether such a sacrifice is a necessary function of ethics, and whether the sacrificial scapegoat must always take the same form (is the feminine/maternal). Is the maternal acting as passive passage to transcendence, even in Levinas'

texts? As Irigaray writes:

> But is this a question of her in all this, even now? Or is it just the mother again?...In the last analysis, isn't this a return to the mother's milk, to the generosity of her blood, to the richness of her womb, with its specifically territorial connotations? Is this regression?(51)

Despite the parallel attempts in Levinas and Irigaray to find a way of illuminating the dark and obscure region of otherness as maternal, Irigaray still raises objections to Levinas. Her main objection is that Levinas does not clarify the relation between his notion of the 'maternal' as ethical and even imperative, in its pre-ontological responsibility, and the, for example, women readers of his text. His project is not a feminist one, so does not develop the possible problems or connections of this relation. As such, his thought is still in danger of returning to the neutrality of ethical responsibility, or utilising 'the maternal' as an illustrative device at the expense of women. She is also concerned that in this failure to interrogate sufficently deeply what is at stake in making this connection, he reinstates the figures of the feminine or the maternal, and does not stress that the 'space' he is drawing upon for such notions, is itself a distorting representation of the otherness of the other. Irigaray also questions Levinas' resort to God as the masculine and patriarchal God of the Old Testament, suggesting Levinas is not prepared to go far enough in his questioning of the frameworks of ethics.

> Monotheistic religions cannot claim to be ethical unless they submit themselves to a radical interrogation relative to the sexual attribution (cartactère sexué) of their paradigms, whether these be of God, the ways in which God is referred to (in particular the masculine gender, when God is not referred to pictorially), God's commandments, etc.(52)

In the final part of this chapter, I will indicate how, although Levinas provides an opening of phenomenology for a feminist understanding of the body in philosophy, his attempts to sustain ethical responsibility as absolute, in fact lead him back to a conception of God which closes off the possibilities he had raised. Even though Levinas takes pains to show how his notion of God is not commensurate with God as presence and patriarch, the overall impression is that of a masculine God who provides the guarantee of ethicality.

In Derrida's discussion of Levinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics'(53) he suggests that in thinking by metaphor Levinas has 'forgotten' to consider the metaphor 'as such'.(54) In other words, that Levinas neglects to consider the processes of signification which have allowed him to advance concepts such as 'infinity' and/or 'totality' in the first place. Derrida's challenge provokes Levinas to develop his notion of 'the trace'. The trace is an 'undecidable' in Levinas' texts: sometimes it seems to be an alternative version of God, the nomination of ethical responsibility, and sometimes it seems to figure as a more linguistic phenomenon (although Levinas insists that it is not a concept as such).

In his book The Trespass of the Sign.(55) Kevin Hart notes the similarity of Derrida's 'différance' and Levinas' notion of the trace; that is, as a function of 'faulting' in any text or experiential moment of presence. There is no origin of the sign of the trace which could be identified and so spark subsequent representations. The trace does not stand prior to representation but is disruptive of it, and as such is disclosed as a kind of 'overprinting', in that every sign betrays its excess. Thus each sign

'stands in' the trace, although every sign is also a trace itself, marking that which has passed absolutely. If the trace is not a concept as such, (ie. it is not strictly a sign itself, since it is absent), then it works as an unceasing function in signification to interrupt by non-coincidence and mis-matching. Signification here is not just the spacing effect of language, but also the disjunction between signs and their expressivity, as in Levinas' characterisation of the Said and the Saying.(56) This disjunction is a spatial and temporal process, setting up signs which are porous and incomplete in character, to be effaced and dispersed again. Like Derrida's 'différance' which differs spatially but also defers temporally, this process is also disruptive of an unfolding of time. Levinas describes it as:

> ...the very passing toward a past more remote than any past and any future which are still set in time - the past of the other, in which eternity takes form, an absolute past which unites all times.(57)

But Levinas makes it clear that for him, there is a specific ethicality implicated in the irrecuperable nature of its past time. For him, this process is ethicality. The movement of the trace lets slip a certain heterogeneous quality of signification even as its irreversible process is past.

> If the signifyingness of a trace consists in signifying without making appear, if it establishes a relationship... which is personal and ethical, it is an obligation and does not disclose, and if, consequently, a trace does not belong to phenomenology, to the comprehension of the appearing and the dissimulating, we can at least approach this signifyingness in another way by situating it with respect to the phenomenology it disrupts.(58)

This process is, for Levinas, linked up with God. '...it obliges with regard to the infinite, the absolutely other', although this is not 'being itself outside of its acts'(59), but the interruption of absence. What this shows us, however, is that the process is no longer neutral or undecidable as it is for Derrida. Levinas explicitly calls this 'exaggeration or this infinite overbidding' a divinity. He writes: 'let us say the word - this divinity...'.(60) Although it is 'that which properly speaking has never been there...is always past', it is clear that he refuses to equivocate on the sex of this notion.

> Through the trace the irreversible past takes on the profile of a 'He'. The beyond from which a face comes is in the third person. The pronoun 'He' expresses its inexpressible irreversibility, already escaping every relation as well as every dissimulation, and in this sense absolutely unencompassable or absolute, a transcendence in an absolute past. The illeity of the third person is the condition for the irreversibility.(61)

If the trace is not commensurate with any particular identity but may divulge its hiddenness in a range of markings, why should its hiddenness here be explicitly given a masculine marking? There is nothing to presume that its 'third person' status as that which is infinitely other but also signifies corporally should be already marked in its very inception as masculine. Levinas could not countenance the trace as feminine. He links the signifyingness of the trace to this (absent) infinity of God but it is still one which bears identifiable links with an Old Testament God. He may be respecting the Talmudic heritage of interpretation which has marked this site already with a masculine sign, but there is no necessary reason why he should do this. The displacement of an origin and a plenitude of excess concerning presence and the proper name should also act to displace the

paternalistic version of God. By introducing this non-coincidence in the trace, the possibility of any 'true' interpretation and accurate mimetic representation are also troubled and dislodged.

This is where Irigaray's 'Questions to Levinas' hit their mark.(62) She suggests that there is a danger that 'the obligations to believe or to give one's allegiance, the injunction not to touch, form an integral part of a monotheism, which conceals its passional nature' and that to risk reintroducing the mono-dimensional associations of God is to risk eradicating not only the passional/carnal dimension but also the feminine/maternal.

> The assertion that the other is always situated within the realm of the father, of the father-son, man-God relation and that it is there and only there that ethics may be established, seems to me to belong to the imperatives of the metaphysical tradition. So the phenomenology of the caress in Levinas falls back within the boundaries staked out by the philosophical constition of the masculine subject...After having been so far - or so close - in the approach to the other sex, in my view to the other, Levinas clings once more to this rock of patriarchy in the very place of carnal love.(63)

Irigaray suggests there could be a mode of understanding difference which has hitherto been obscure, but which could open to ethicality. She does not shrink from exploring the religious or mystical connotations of such an idea, but she resists the explicitly theological claims which Levinas makes in the context of ethics.(64)

At one point in 'The Fecundity of the Caress' Irigaray writes of 'the caress which precedes every caress' and 'a becoming in which the other gives of a space-time which is still free'.(65) This hints of an

irreducible horizon of alterity as archaic, a 'remembrance of what has not yet taken place...That which has not yet been born into language? That which has a place, has taken place, but has no language. Sensibility which speaks for the first time. Which pronounces the other in silence.'(66) Like Levinas, she intimates a return to the experiential breach of that which exceeds the Said, which is 'a memory of the flesh, the place of approach'. But for her, this moment must also allow the possibility of the appearance of the feminine/maternal. For Irigaray this is 'ethical fidelity to incarnation. To destroy it risks suppressing alterity, both God's and the other's. Thus dissolving all possibility of access to trancendence'.(66)

CHAPTER NINE: ETHICS AND SIGNIFICATION

So far, the feminine has been suggested as a disruptive force in the context of more orthodox philosophical distinctions between subject/object, transcendence/immanence, spirit/carnal. I have attempted to show how this force might be used strategically as an 'operative viewpoint'(1) from which to conduct a critical revaluation of ethics and embodiment as these notions are articulated in phenomenology and psychoanalytic theory. The feminine has been codified as an 'excess', that which overreaches and underplays the intentional analysis of desire and the structure of the subject as desiring being. Excess is not exhausted by this codification. Rather, it is taken up strategically to provoke the question of sexual difference for feminist philosophy and to renew the resources of phenomenological description and regenerate psychoanalytic narratives.

Levinas, Kristeva and Irigaray are all concerned with the systems of signification, interpretation and language which engender the horizons of ethics. But they are also concerned to see ethics as an enactment or dramatic encounter with the other which is not reducible to textual interpretation. This concern is an attempt to find a mode of expressivity for an experiential dimension which is neither a return to identity and presence, but is not prone to the loss of ethical discrimination in the free play of signification. This revaluation of ethics attempts to locate ethicality 'elsewhere' to the inexorable force of the Law. And yet, it must rely upon the systems of signification to explicate the significance of naming ethics as 'elsewhere'.

What is the relation between textual re-interpretation, the reading and/or subversion of the resources provided by the socio-symbolic, and the desire to retain an immediacy of the experiential encounter with the other? In the context of the thinkers discussed here, both approaches seek a language of equivocal possibility, a thematisation which is not a closure. Both seek a mode of re-presentation, which can rupture its own conditions of presentation in the process. Such meaning does not rely upon a conception of truth which is to be re-interpreted mimetically, but is instead generative of its own potentials. The process of presenting that which is already unpresentable renews itself through its very impossibility. This version of truth is '... not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being'.(2)

In the present chapter, I will examine the fascination which these thinkers display with sacred texts and mythologies. In the search for a way of characterising ethics which will allow for the recognition of difference, and particularly sexual difference, the critical interrogation of the site of the sacred provides a possibility of rethinking these concerns.

Levinas, Kristeva and Irigaray read the sacred texts of Western culture, and Greek mythology in order to refract a different possible account of otherness. In so doing they evoke other hidden aspects of these texts which will be brought to bear on understanding difference in an ethical context. A certain method of reading which is not seeking to close interpretation, which can entertain equivocation, corresponds to their attempts to allow for difference.

The question of the Hebraic and the Hellenic is as Derrida writes, 'a space of interrogation' or 'a passageway'[3] which can be opened up in considering difference. If these two traditions constitute the major strands of thought in Western culture, the two terms of this polarisation can also function to articulate problems of interpretation and difference.

If Kristeva and Irigaray appear Hellenic in their concern with (an Hegelian?) negativity, dialectical relations and modes of signification in the symbolic, Levinas is Hebraic in his concern with the mysterious dimension of otherness in the revelation of alterity. But Kristeva and Irigaray are also concerned with the interpretation of otherness as it arises in the sacred texts of Western thought, and the concern with the feminine places them as 'marginal' to philosophic concerns with rationality. Similarly, Levinas is articulating his thought in the context of philosophy (his Hellenic dimension). These thinkers are all concerned with 'heretical' or disruptive versions of ethics, and as such, seeking to negotiate these sets of polarities. Further, it is not clear to what extent the Hebraic and Hellenic can be distinguished in their impacts on Western culture when they share the common influence of Old Testament texts, and when subsequent 'translations' of the strands of thought have become intertwined through time.

Despite Levinas's separation of his philosophical and exegetical texts, as Edith Wyschogrod points out, in Levinas's thought we find '...that to which one is responsible is a non-thematisable value unique and inescapable without a corresponding dis-value. Levinas does not hesitate to name this value: it is God'.[4] Although he would dissent from being named as a

theologian, Levinas is undoubtedly influenced by the impact of ethical activity on selfhood drawn from Judaic sources, and a certain Rabbinic tradition of commentary and interpretation, which focusses on text and conversation rather than metaphysical speculation in Platonic or Christian terms. In this sense the Judaic element in Levinas's philosophy filters through and cuts across his more overtly philosophical work, in that it coincides with his characterisation of the ethical as that which has been 'forgotten' by philosophy.(5) His work cannot really be read as a synthesis of these polarities, but if the Hebraic corresponds to the Other for philosophy (in a thinking of ethics, not ontology), we might recognise a kind of translation process at work, in an attempt to render less hidden the otherness to philosophy, while refusing to over-expose or distort its differences.

The final section of Catherine Chalier's book on Levinas(6) begins with an epigraph from Levinas's Difficile Liberté: 'The non-comprehension of the ethical essence of spirit is due, in the most part, to the forgetting of Hebrew'.(7)

Chalier goes on to make a parallel between the Said as the Greek logos, and the Saying as Hebraic. The Said, the logos, reveals a certain equivocation even as it tries to speak with the voice of coherent reason, an equivocation which comes to distort or derange it. Even harsher measures are required to try and exercise control.

> Philosophy founds itself on a profound allergy to alterity. But there is a persistent evocation of a saying otherwise to the said. It is this which the Said would have to hear/understand (entendre), in becoming, not logically or rationally, as it elects a Greek place to name that which exceeds.(8)

She suggests that while every language could be said to be punctuated by the process of absence and its constant evocation, perhaps 'the Hebraic language persists in the thinking of the necessity of absence more than any other language'.(9)

While it would be artifical to equate the Hellenic dimension with philosophy and ontology, and the Hebraic with a religious dimension, we can recognise in the articulation of hiddenness, otherness and excess a mode of drawing out that which remains already in diffuse abeyance. The 'persistent evocation of a saying otherwise' is linked, in Chalier's book, with the feminine and the possibility of giving an account of otherness which is no longer neutral but nor is it a return to essentialism.(10)

'Judaism and the feminine element', an early essay by Levinas,(11) deals explicitly with the feminine as this force of disruption. This is not just a reading of women of the Old Testament, but casts a crucial light on his exposition of the feminine in Totality and Infinity, as it comes to function in that text as the very condition of ethics. Significantly, the essay is prefaced by a short account of the biblical structure of exegesis and interpretation, which Levinas even suggests precedes and is responsible for the very shaping of the Old Testament itself.
There is already, Levinas suggests, a process of comment and selection shaping what will be included or excluded, the text is not self-justifying and there is no 'original' text from which all subsequent interpretation is derived. Such an absence of authority undoes a particular founding certainty to which appeal could be made; the Old Testament is rendered text and so seems to become fallible. Levinas denies that this is a

relativising of the sacred place that the Old Testament occupies; it does not reduce its significance to a question of the writers and the selection of sacred texts. It is not just a 'consensus of all' which renders such texts significant. Rather, this approach opens up possible questioning which, for Levinas, increases the sacred nature of the texts; not so they remain untouchable and irreproachable, but to show that such potentials were already evoked in the work themselves, and interpretation is not a matter of chronology and cause and effect in this strict sense. If the texts implicitly contain and erupt with other meanings, then there is a possibility of these meanings being re-activated in certain epochs. Levinas links this mode of interpretation and its openness to radicality with his reflections on women in the Old Testament, figures who feature almost mythically, yet only become radical in accordance with the readings of contemporary feminist theory. It is because they can signify as 'heroic figures' but also as sites of excess as 'the feminine' that the possibility of reinterpreting their significance is broached.

Thus his reading interprets the names of Old Testament women; Miriam and Deborah, Tamar, Naomi and Ruth, Bathsheba, the Shulamite in the Song of Songs, Judith, Esther, and Sarah, in this light. His concern is not merely attending to the indispensable role they played in keeping the tradition safe, ('Biblical events would not have gone forward as they did but for their watchful clarity, the toughness of their determination, and their cunning and spirit of sacrifice'),[12] but to read this indispensability with a view to a mode of being which begins to rupture the category of identity. Levinas indicates that morality is not a category added antecedently to these figures, but 'already has the weight of an

ontological basis'.[13] The moral reminder such figures evoke is inseparable from their figuring as feminine. Their force is not merely an insistence on the morality of the tradition, where their actions would be contextualised in the narrative of an inevitable unfolding of a teleological horizon, but as an excessive version of femininity, which shakes any supremacy of being. Figuratively, the feminine threatens 'spirit in its masculine existence',[14] not with counter-threat but with a reproach which comes 'before' the ontological has broken with the elemental. This failure to be similarly uprooted and destructive as the masculine which is violently torn away from 'spontaneous life'[15] is the way that the feminine intersects the 'geometry of infinite and cold space'.[16] The modes of domination and colonising tendencies are symbolically seen to share a masculine codification.

> An insurmountable crudeness is left in the products of our conquering civilisation. The world in which reason becomes more and more self-conscious is not habitable. It is hard and cold like those supply depots where merchandise is piled up which cannot satisfy; while there it neither clothes nor feeds those who are hungry;...true with the truth of calculation and brought into the anonymous realm of the economy...There it is - spirit in its masculine existence.[17]

But as Levinas points out, he does not mean by this that the figure of the woman is merely a cipher for all goodness and kindness, which is to obliterate her identity in respect of an ideal beyond her. In this sense she would be instrumental as merely facilitating an understanding of that which is other - she would be reduced to the status of a symbol without any identity of her own. Rather it is on the level of her very selfhood, in the context of the proper names of the Biblical women for example, that this dimension might be articulated. And it is also to say that this possibility is inscribed in the very notion of identity, in the disruptive

interstices of self-presence which does not coincide with itself. The attempt to retain an equivocation between woman as identity and woman as a mode of being, or the feminine, without obliterating either, corresponds to the equivocal readings of women in Greek mythology which Irigaray explores, and Kristeva's readings of Christian symbolism.(18)

A great deal of Kristeva's work is engaged with examining the signification of the mytho-poetic symbols which gain cultural domination, an archaeology of meanings which corresponds to Levinas's interpretative dialogue with Talmudic texts. For both Kristeva and Levinas, this process is not one of just de-mythologising but also of enriching an interpretative tradition. Similarly for Irigaray, Judaeo-Christian theology and the Greek gods and goddesses provide a locus of rich literary and religious symbolism which can be reactivated in the context of her own work.

One of the most important aspects of Irigaray's texts is the attempt to 're-construct' a maternal genealogy or an articulation of the effaced mother-daughter relations, from the resources of a culture responsible for occluding this possibility in the first place. One of the ways this project can begin is through an analysis of religious and mythological discourses, partly to illustrate the nature and extent of the sacrifice of mother-daughter relations, and partly to try and establish a less damaging process of iconography and idealisation for women.(19)

Apart from her consideration of the Christian tradition, Irigaray also examines the mythological figures of women in antiquity.

Ariadne is considered as a figure symbolically entrapped in the labyrinths of masculine constructions; she sacrifices her own 'exit' from the labyrinth as she is sacrificed for Theseus and abandoned on Naxos. While she facilitates freedom, she is also left with no means to articulate her own. Irigaray also sees Ariadne as symbolically used by Nietzsche as a way to negotiate death and sensuality in his own texts. While her identity is essential to the successful negotiating of the labyrinths of language and death, she herself fulfills the function at the cost of her own possibilities.(20)

Similarly, the figures of Athena and Antigone, despite representing the law of the state or of the father and being conscripted for such purposes, also bear witness to the potentially disruptive and hidden feminine forces within the masculine-coded constructions. Antigone is 'the eternal irony of the community', essential for its reproduction yet at odds with its attempts to stand independently of family allegiance. She is sacrificed, yet her very sacrifice serves as a constant reminder of what is symbolically walled up in the very heart of the community. For Hegel too, Antigone constantly chafes at the attempt to establish ethics and the universal in the community if they are constructed at her expense.(21) Athena is her father's daughter, mediating justice and knowledge at the cost of her own mother and the symbolic maternal/feminine. She seems to represent an icon through which and by which the masculine line can be perpetuated, whether it is the patrilineal name or the transmission of knowledge. Veiled, seductive and desirable, she promises creative, generative potential. But in being positioned as such, she is also threatening; she can kill/castrate with such power. And yet, as Irigaray

makes clear, this power is achieved at the sacrifice of her own passion, she speaks with her father's words, not her own.(22)

> Appropriating the mother's power, swallowing it up, introjecting it, he engenders, produces this daughter who gives herself for what she is not: a simulacrum assumed by the God to help him in his work.(23)

Each of these figures is a symbolic instantiation of the ambiguous positioning of the feminine as other but also as occupying a central site in the sacred preservation of the community and of ethical continuity. Each time the attempt to conscript the equivocal is disruptive and disrupting. As Grosz expresses it:

> These female figures do not represent a pre- or non-patriarchal narrative, but are the consequences of an already functioning patriarchal order. Nevertheless, they represent an excess or superfluity that overflows their patriarchal context.(24)

In the first part of About Chinese Women,(25) (and also in Tales of Love)(26), Kristeva looks at the significance of Christianity as an attempt to synthesize Hebraic and Hellenic, an synthesis which is itself an attempt to regulate the equivocal relationship between differences. She is involved in an analysis of the elements of undecidability which still resonate within such an attempted synthesis, the forces which refuse to silence their evocative voices even when recuperated under one heading. In tracing the way that the identity of a mono-theistic community emerges, she notes the way a notion of communality precedes, but eventually merges with state unity and law. The concerns of the community are fused under paternal moral concerns, such that what is seen as counter to the interests of that community must be suppressed or excluded. This familiar narrative

of the logics of exclusion is given particular force for women, since it is the 'paganistic' element of undecidability which must be kept under control, and this is equated with the undecidable figure of the woman, seen as diversifying, fragmentary and splitting. The sacrifice of that which is seen as disruptive allows the establishment of 'the principle of One Law - One Purifying Transcendent Guarantor of the ideal interest'.(26) A monotheistic God becomes masculine, aligned with the law as unequivocally uniting. The bond which is established will ensure the continuity of the community. But it also ensures a difference is maintained between the sexes, and it is at the expense of women who must both protect the community against the eruption of the outlawed elements, but also stand symbolically for that which threatens the whole system.

The figuring of women does not merely place them as peripheral or disruptive, which would accord them a dangerously independent status, but centralises them within the symbolic, precisely as symbolic. Impurity, which is the contamination of unity with foreign elements, is aligned with the interiority of the body. 'Unclean' secretions, bodily fluids, disrupt the clean lines which might otherwise establish purity of form. In attempting to expel them from the body, it becomes clear they are also already part of the body. (Kristeva discusses this process in Powers of Horror, and it corresponds to Irigaray's essay 'The "Mechanics" of Fluids' in This Sex which is not One, and her discussion of the morphology of the female body, passim).(28) This alignment of impurity and interiority is further aligned with femininity and maternity.

> Biblical impurity is permeated with the tradition of defilement...It points to but does not signify an autonomous force that can be threatening for divine agency...Such a force is rooted historically (in

> the structure of religions) and subjectively (in the structuration of the subject's identity) in the cathexis of the maternal function - mother, woman, reproduction. But the Biblical text - and therein lies its extraordinary specificity - performs the tremendous forcing that consists in subordinating maternal power (whether historical or phantasmic, natural or reproductive) to symbolic order as pure logical order regulating social performance, divine law attended to in the temple.(29)

Here Kristeva and Levinas are dealing with a process of separation from 'spontaneity' which is simultaneously a 'forgetting' of the feminine maternal in attempting to regulate the forces of uncontrollable equivocation, but which also establishes it symbolically as a realm of interiority - at the heart of the community in the home, and within the body. In this position it functions as an orthodox equation of woman with ethicality, maintaining the protection of the interests of the community and the tradition, and placing women within the spheres of reproduction and immanence associated with the body.
But it is also possible to recognise in this equivocal moment a rupturing of the very unity it is supposed to protect, and attach a feminine force to this rupture, which exposes the deceptive nature of neutrality masquerading as objectivity.

In conjunction with the process of presenting a narrative of unity which is also a neutralising of difference, we can see the importance of the analysis of the mythological origins of sexual difference. The symbolic consequences of such stories are what is at stake, not whether or not they are believed in any literal sense. The implications of such narratives have far-reaching effects on the kinds of symbolic and cultural modes of identification available for men and women. But it is also important to consider under what conditions such stories present themselves; as singular

truth or as interpretation. If sexual difference is seen to originate in the derivation of Eve from Adam's rib, then not only is Eve secondary to Adam, condemned to be other and inferior, but she is also biologically secondary (as it is a physical separation), and Adam has the primary relation to God. But this narrative of Adam's priority is undermined by other possible interpretations offered by Rabbinic texts. Of other possible mythological interpretations the following are offered:

- Woman is 'derived quasi-grammatically from man' in the derivation of ishah from ish in Hebrew; an etymological justification which draws attention to the primarily linguistic nature of difference and so to an absent transcendental signifier (similar to Lacan's position).

- two separate acts of creation were called for; one for the masculine and one for the feminine, giving separate access to God for both parts.

- The woman has priority over the man in terms of prophecy and hearing God, as Sarah's priority before Abraham illustrates.(30)

- Eve hears the divine word and the voice of God, so she is also an 'interlocutor of God'.

- Adam was created sexually undifferentiated or hermaphrodite (an interpretation of the verse 'Male and female created he them', Gen 1:27). This is suggested by the Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 8:1), and discussed in the Talmud (Er. 18a).(31)

Commenting on this, Levinas writes;

> Did not God give the name Adam to man and woman joined together, as if the two were one, as if the unity of the person were able to triumph over the dangers which lie in wait for it only by a duality inscribed in his very essence?(32)

These possibilities establish the absence of one 'true' interpretation in the very exposition of the narrative. Sexual difference is already inscribed from the first, in these suggestions of equal but different modes of access to an original account of sexual difference. This is, as Tina Chanter(33) points out, the content of Aristophanes' myth in Plato's Symposium.(34) But does this not amount ultimately to a move to an initial neutrality and so to the obliteration of sexual difference? If there is an initial hermaphrodite or androgynous being, it would seem to privilege a loss or lack of sexual marking, rendering sexual difference less important or a constant and tragic attempt to regain the sense of loss realised in the differentiation. For Aristophanes, the two halves are destined to roam the world seeking their missing half, yearning for what has been severed. If they meet, they long to melt into one another and 'become one instead of two'.(35) This fusion corresponds to an erasure of difference in a totalising equality.

But Levinas is instead suggesting that sexual difference is not secondary in being less than adequate; it is seen as more important that the division take place than the initial state of unity. Hence there is no nostalgia for a lost origin. It is important for each sex to have its own identity and not to be subordinate to each other, or to one, or to a totalising horizon. In this version of sexual difference as 'secondary', the difference is not only acknowledged but affirmed; it is not tragic, to

be overcome in favour of an equality based on its obliteration. Levinas also points out that any notion of 'evil' is now seen as socially produced, since it arises with difference - it cannot be ascribed on a primordial level to Eve.

Levinas offers the structure of these symbolic stories as a strategic comment on the priority of the masculine which is commensurate with the 'popular idea of the rib'.(36) In other words, his concern is to find a way of articulating the way the masculine has come to dominate over the proliferation of possible meanings, when the masculine is aligned with totality, unity and priority. In addition the alternative interpretations throw into question the 'natural' course of the narrative, the entrenching of the notion of the feminine as secondary which permeates cultural structures. Such entrenchment is closure for the kind of equivocation which allows productive relations of difference.

We can notice a similar agenda in Kristeva's analysis of the role of the Virgin Mary. In her essay 'Stabat Mater'(37) she draws heavily upon Marina Warner's book Alone of All Her Sex; the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary(38) to indicate how the Virgin Mary becomes a symbolic axis of the conjunction between Hebraic and Hellenic; and as a conjunction between virginity and maternity. In a moment of undecidability, the figure presents a potential site of ambivalence, for the two traditions, as well as for understandings of woman. There is a potential disruption of the Greek logos and Jewish monotheism in the presence of a divine feminine figure, central to religion but neither one thing nor another. But this dangerous ambivalence is conscripted for control and synthesis, in that the

virginal aspect becomes a pure and holy asceticism, and maternity becomes the continuity of the community via reproduction.

> A woman's discourse, would that be it? Did not Christianity attempt, among other things, to freeze that seesaw? To stop it, tear women away from its rhythm, settle them permanently in the spirit? Too permanently...(39)

The freezing of undecidability sets up an ideal, fusing with the existing ideal of virginity in courtly love and the ideal of devoted maternal love. The impossible totality of the virgin mother is not only disseminated within patriarchal cultures, but becomes the prototype for Western love relations.

Apocryphal sources make Mary into an eternal virgin by establishing her own immaculate conception - she is not even born with original sin like mortal women. As an eternal figure, her sexuality can be written out, separated from her to signify sin, bodily transience and a reminder of the mortality which is punished by death. In contrast, chastity signifies eternity and continual life. In such purity, Mary can become the mother not only of Christ but of God and man, serving this triple role. As she is no longer mortal she can move freely from one incarnation to another. In an echo of oriental religions she is 'transported'.

Her authority is further extended when she becomes not only Queen of Heaven but is charged with the care of the Church and accorded supreme earthly power. Analogous to the noble lady of the Mediaeval court, she demands ardent, chaste and exclusive desire as exemplary Woman, free of all sin. Such apparent authority disguises the severity of its demands. As this inaccessible totality she is not only remote from her suitors but also from the aspirations of women forced to try and emulate her.

When the attributes of the Virgin are changed to encompass maternal love, apparently tender and homely, it seems as if the lofty figure is being mediated by human signs of fallibility; the fluids of milk and tears which mark some materiality and emotions of compassion. But even here, the signs are already part of an attempt to deny death; there is nothing excessive about her grief.

> 'The sorrow of Mary is never a tragic overflowing; joy and a certain triumph follow the tears, as if the conviction that death does not exist were an irrational but unshakeable maternal certitude upon which to base the principle of the ressurrection...(40)

The suppression or repression of mortality which amounts to a denial of death, requires the presence of a feminine/maternal figure to bear the weight of the resurrection or the passage to immortality. The price is the raising of the maternal to an immortal biology, bridge across death for the masculine, at the cost of her own self-realisation. There is no corresponding space for her to have a relation to death.
In Kristeva's terms, the dangerous moment of rupture is contained by erasing jouissance, in virginity, and channelling it, in maternal reproduction, to sustain the deathless ideal of the masculine, whether this is the law, the community or the subject.

This figure, the epitome of romantic idealisation, utterly serene icon as ideal and untroubled, functions as a sublimating vessel for various cultures. And yet Kristeva indicates its 'clever balanced architecture today appears to be crumbling',(41) the'psychotic sore of modernity' is 'the incapacity of contemporary codes to tame the maternal'.(42)

Thus it reveals that which it cannot contain even in trying to cover over the slippage of excess, codified both as death and as jouissance.

In a similar way, Irigaray discusses the figure of the Virgin Mary as simultaneously freezing the feminine/maternal into its symbolic position and denying any agency as such.(43) She draws upon Feuerbach's analysis of religious discourse as the 'perfecting' of human horizons, the human aspiration towards the divine given shape in the context of religion.(44) Religious discourse has given cultural shape to this projection as the relation between Father and Son, with the Holy Ghost as mediating relation between them. God acts as a goal for humans, withdrawn from the world into a concentrated focus of aspirations and accomplishments. The uniqueness and unreachable infinity of God must, however, be interrupted by the relation with the son, in order to grant some kind of access to an otherwise unbroachable divinity. The son establishes a mediation between human and divine. However, as Feuerbach points out, the feminine is 'veiled out' of the divine in any other function or guise than that of the maternal function, which is severely limited, constrained and given a merely instrumental role.(45) The Virgin Mary is coded as a cipher through which the divine spirit may pass, and even in her very instantiation as mother is reduced to an icon of stasis and self-denial, to allow the son to come to be. Any dynamism she might present on her own terms is effaced in such representations.

For Levinas, the romantic attitude may constitute a way of denying ambivalence (coded as the feminine), because it refuses to recognise a certain openness or interruption to its movements - even in the heights of

the cult of the Virgin Mary or the Eternal Feminine. He suggests Talmudic interpretation is able to diffuse this closure by exposing the alterity (death, excess), in its process. Even the textual moments in the Old Testament which seem to have no other directive than their own eroticism, these 'gripping images', are 'de-poeticized'.

According to Levinas, the romantic deifying of the other which remains caught up in its own pleasure, the repetitious circuits of desire which correspond to this escape from death/excess even as its haunting returns, 'is foreign to Judaisim.'.(46) Love as its own end, as an enclosing of these circuits without a further horizon of difference, has covered over the eschatological dimension of love, but cannot succeed in exorcising it altogether. If there was a way to recognise this spacing effect, we could perhaps suggest 'more appropriate fulfillments' of difference. It may seem paradoxical to affirm death in the context of love, but Levinas is suggesting a dimension of alterity which is excessive to strategies of containment, found in both the erotic and death.

> The forms of the romantic that one finds in the Bible are soon interpreted in the Midrash in such a way as to make the eschatological side come out...What one calls sentimental love...- the romances of Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Rachel, of David and Bathsheba- undergoes a de-poeticization in the Midrash. This is not due to prudish timidity but to the permanent opening of the messianic perspective...(47)

There seem to be a number of worrying points raised by what Levinas suggests here; is a particular form of erotic love to be sacrificed to something beyond? - which is not in the name of closure, but to keep open other possibilities - how can Levinas expect to ensure this horizon is not recuperable as the deathless ideals of (in this context) the Virgin Mary? Or, as he writes, to the 'dynamism of love (which) leads it beyond the

instant and even beyond the loved person'.(48)

> Maternity is, in the Rabbinic interpretation of love, subordinate to a human destiny which exceeds the bound of the "joy of the family": it is necessary to fulfill Israel, to "multiply the image of god" inscribed on the faces of men.(49)

The 'subordination' of maternity in this respect rescues it from a 'duty' to the family to reproduce, which casts the woman in the determining role as mother. But maternity is then reconscripted for a further ideal, which may leave women in an equally constricting position. Levinas is seeking a means of characterising relations otherwise to those which appear as a flight from death, for example, romantic love seems to idealise the other and to deny openness. For Levinas, a certain version of erotic love can only be described pejoratively (eg. 'in the romances of Amnon and Tamar, or, in certain respects, in the loves of Samson'),(50) in appearing to totalise. This totalising move is also a closure of the feminine. However, as already noted, it seems that Levinas replicates some of this closure, if he seeks to pre-judge the relations which are to count as 'opening the messianic perspective' and those relations which are 'merely' erotic. If Levinas' project is fundamentally one of ethics, his interpretative readings of sacred texts need to be developed in the context of a feminist perspective in order to illustrate ways that the dangers of his texts might be circumvented.

CHAPTER TEN: KRISTEVA, IRIGARAY AND THE MATERNAL/FEMININE

We have seen that Kristeva's notion of the semiotic chora, Irigaray's notion of the imaginary and the 'natural', and Levinas's 'pre-ontological past' all have reference to the maternal as a symbolic figuring of that which is disruptive and anarchic, and, while being positioned as originary, also works to unsettle such a notion of origin. The process of drawing attention to such disruption and its exclusion, is given an ethical force, in order to be able to respond to otherness in other than a dominating fashion.

But if these notions are not to replicate a reductively essentialist equation between woman as constituted identity and those qualities considered ethically desirable in orthodox approaches to ethics, we must still consider the equation from a feminist perspective. Can it ever be anything other than a repetition of existing and restrictive equations? The figure of the mother is traditionally associated with the embodiment of idealised virtues of forbearance, fortitude, care and patience, associations which, in present patriarchal relations work not as a paradigm for different ethical relations, but as a site of constraint and exploitation. Here the qualities associated with caring and with 'access to the other', in any attempt to address the vulnerability of the other, have been conscripted to the interests of the classical family structure and appear to hold that structure in place.

According to both Irigaray and Kristeva, the construction of what is culturally understood as ethical is built at the expense of the suppression of certain forces associated with the maternal/feminine, or their diversion

into rigid symbolic structures. This formulation of a founding move of exclusion or repression is to be understood from its effects, the diagnosis of violence and crisis which is perpetuated in the discourse of the same. Kristeva writes:

> Man overcomes the unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place - in the place and stead of death and thought... Such a love is in fact, logically speaking, a surge of anguish at the very moment when the identity of thought and living body collapses. The possibilities of communication having been swept away, only the subtle gamut of sound, touch and visual traces, older than language and newly worked out, are preserved as an ultimate shield against death.(1)

Kristeva indicates the symbolic link of the maternal with death, as absence of communication and a continuity which obliterates the fragile boundaries of identity. The sense of identity as something solid and reliable, becomes counterposed to the chaos of an origin prior to identity, and the dispersal or extinction in death.

By creating an icon of mother love which is represented as ideal, eternal and unchanging, the anxiety of this process is cathected into the solid identity of the maternal. In Kristeva's work this is linked to the symbolic realisation of such processes in Christianity, through the figure of Mary as mother, presented as ideal.(2) But the vestiges and residues of this process are left to resonate as traces in the interstices of bodies and representations of bodies, which constantly reinvade the attempt to forget. For Kristeva and Irigaray this leads to ever-increasing attempts to shore up defences against uncertainties, in increasingly costly ways. Kristeva draws attention to the cost of this sacrificial ordering for women 'living the sacrifice',(3) as the lay ramifications connected to these psycho-symbolic structures.

Irigaray also identifies this process of a certain sacrifice of the maternal feminine.

> The culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at present...let us look at what foundations this edifice is built upon...This underpinning is woman producer of the social order, acting as infrastructure of that order; all of Western culture rests upon the murder of the mother.(4)

This symbolic 'murder' is, for Irigaray the surreptitious exchange of a sacrificial element in the rites and rituals of a society into the immolation of a scapegoat - codified as women or nature.(5) This sacrifice is seen as necessary, as that which 'brings the social space into being'.(6) But Irigaray questions whether there might be some more productive way of approaching rites and rituals which preserves the sociality of the practice and yet is less destructive. 'Something of a sort has dominated certain eras, and is trying to emerge in our own, without, however, being conceived as a reworking or an abolition of the sacrificial'.(7) Is it possible to formulate practices not based on 'killing, cutting up and eating'?

For Irigaray, the possibility of articulating such rites and rituals would allow for respect, not 'dereliction'. Irigaray is not proposing to circumvent death in the eternal life of an ideal society; for her dereliction demands an unreasonable price extracted without acknowledgement of value, in an economy of violence. There is a kind of destruction, she argues, which is a prelude to rebirth and can be understood as such; this would be part of 'a culture of health in so far as it is spiritual and divine. A community should organise a space-time which is in harmony with micro- and macrocosmic needs'. Of course, she immediately questions; 'Is this a utopia? Can a society live without sacrifice?'.(8)

Kristeva also hints at this possibility of re-reading rituals in a less destructive fashion, through her critical examination of the symbolic sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This moment of the death of identity, the mark of a threshold of spiritual and bodily forces, is the obliteration of the body in favour of the elevation to the divine: 'the killing of the body is the path through which the body-self has access to the Name of the Other who loves me'.(9) While the body's destruction in this sense is a passive masochism of suffering in allowing the action of Agape or God's love to be received, it is not inseparable from the sacrifice of identity as presence and the relinquishing of essential subjectivity we find in some post-structuralist writings.(10) If the obliteration of self in the process of desire and transcendence is seductive in its loss of responsibility, of sexual differentiation and of the problematics of identity, it is also a passivity lacking agency.

However, Kristeva seems to indicate that the processes of the shedding of self in the context of a kind of elective passivity, in being chosen, creates the possibility of a different conception of the self not based on the ego. 'Agape builds psychic space as the complex space of a subject'.(11) Somewhat paradoxically, an 'excess' of passivity opens a space which may be seen as other than sacrificial. It seems to allow for the development of a kind of subjectivity not based on self-identity, since its very constitution is allowed by an other, and it also seems to open access to others. Kristeva writes; 'the love of one's neighbour contains an additional element...The absorption of narcissism within the image of the Oneself is stretched out to include neighbours, foreigners and sinners...'.(12)

For Kristeva this process of an 'unsettling' of the self which allows for an ethical openness to the other is not contained by the negativity of a relation to death - death is only a symbolic realisation of one aspect of this process. The other part is the excess of otherness found in the relations of love and idealisation. In this sense, the death of Christ is a mark of abandonment to love, the dynamic processes of construction-destruction played out in 'the erotic unleasing of the death drive'.(13) This excessive passivity which is beyond even masochism, is, Kristeva contends, seen as virtue in suffering only when it is frozen in a static symbolic formation such as Christ on the cross. At this level it becomes universalised and hypostatised and, as such, works as a negative force to provoke guilt and feelings of inadequacy. In this manifestation, it is fixed into a representation of death which 'writes out' the ecstasy of passion. What indeed is sacrificed is 'a lustful body, the erotic body', which becomes that element of embodiment obliterated in the 'synthesis of the resurrection'.(14) Consequently, despite the positive elements for an ethicality in the excess of love, the horizon of death as negativity once again inscribes its boundaries. In so doing, it symbolically excludes one element of abandon, then codified as the uncontrollable forces of desire and the erotic, which come to be associated with women.

If there was a more fluid way to interpret these processes which did not necessarily result in the traps of these kinds of representation, but also refused to sacrifice one element into the oblivion of non-representation, there would be a way to develop rites and rituals other than as destructive circuits. This would also be a way of acknowledging the unpaid debt to the

underlying (maternal/feminine) forces underlying the whole process; allowing these forces to perhaps gain a mode of expression.

But Kristeva seems less optimistic than Irigaray in this respect, since she returns to the aesthetic dimension and thereby to a certain inevitability concerning the forms of representation. In other words, there is no choice but to submit to the process of reinscribing the horizon of death in the process of representation. It seems that 'no one escapes it. Except perhaps the saint, the mystic or the writer who through the power of language, nevertheless succeeds in doing no better than to...identify with love itself - a fire of tongues, an exit from representation'. (15) But this either/or choice is mediated somewhat by aesthetic possibility, the constant revising of the boundaries of this process (which we can link up to Kristeva's writing on the avant garde).

> ...it seems to me that there is only one way to go through the religion of the Word, or its counterpart, the more or less discreet cult of the Mother; it is the 'artist's' way, those who make up for the vertigo of language weakness with the oversaturation of sign-systems.(16)

Irigaray interprets this 'oversaturation of sign-systems' with more political directness than Kristeva would perhaps intend. She argues in favour of a process of intervention and critique, placing positive symbolic constructions of woman in the face of the damaging circuits of logos and the idealisation of identity.(17)

And yet, curiously this desire for a political dimension leads her to appear far more tentative and uncertain about her own positionality than Kristeva.

In the formulation of 'new' possibilities of representation, a certain concern to avoid the repetition of the same, a separation from the mother as (symbolically) unmediated jouissance, is required. As Jane Gallop[18] puts it, the daughter must be able to separate from her mother in order to speak for herself, to work out an identity and to be able to establish difference. But this seems to entail a rejection of the (symbolic) mother.

> To speak the same language is to speak the 'langue maternelle', the mother tongue, taught to the daughter by her mother...The obligation to reproduce - the daughter's obligation to reproduce the mother, the mother's story - is a more difficult obstacle than even the Father's Law...[19]

The separation from the mother which is yet not a sacrifice engenders Irigaray's ambiguous postion; she does not want to assume the place and role of the mother and yet she wants to preserve a space for the maternal function as a force in its own right; to be able to negotiate the otherwise sometimes destructive relations. The separation of identities which would allow an exchange of dialogue, not the repression of the maternal function nor a fusion into the continuity of jouissance, requires the possibility of some form of signification.

> It is necessary to create a symbolism between women such that love can take place between them. This love is only possible in any case at the moment between women who can speak with each other. Without intervals of exchange, or words, or gestures, passions between women can show themselves...in quite a cruel way.[20]

Is there a way to negotiate the separation which is not violent? Irigaray's own dialogue addressed to her mother is uncertain, moving between a desire to separate and to change, also demanding that the mother keep herself separate, but still maintain a dialogue and exchange.

> You put yourself in my mouth and I suffocate... Continue to be also outside. Keep yourself/me outside too. Don't be engulfed, don't engulf me, in what passes from you to me. I would so much like that we both be here. So that one doesn't disappear into the other or the other into the one.(21)

The relationship to the maternal other is also discussed in Kristeva's essay 'Stabat Mater'.(22) Kristeva raises two questions. The first is a challenging question for feminism; 'What does the desire for motherhood correspond to?'. What Kristeva seeks here is a means of considering maternity in conjunction with 'the new forms of representation' demanded by a feminist perspective, a way of thinking which is neither negation nor acceptance. The challenge for feminist thinking lies in analysing this notion without a view to either rejecting it, as for example de Beauvoir tends to do, in seeing it as an imprisoning of women into a misconceived biological destiny, or else unproblematically valorising it in the name of woman as mother or earth-goddess. The valorisation of motherhood and its association with ethicality is discussed extensively in feminist theory; for example, Sara Ruddick's Maternal Thinking(23) and the work of Nancy Chodorow,(24) but it is often given a positive association without a deeper analysis of what is at stake in such an identity itself. In the context of an object relations account of mothering in general, there is a more static account of identity as cultural or biological, which minimises any conception of intrapsychic disruptions in order to focus on relations in the intersubjective realm. This approach also tends to locate any possible changes wholly within interpersonal or interfamilial relations and not to broaden the analysis to wider concerns. Such concerns would include the consequences of these forms of representation on the social,cultural and historical understandings of women and maternity.

The danger of these analyses is that in focussing on identity in the intersubjective realm, they accept the terms and conditions of ontological determinations, which once again lead back into a refusal or domination of the other. In order to seek a displacement of the self which is radical enough to allow for otherness, it is necessary to probe deeper into the structuring of such identities and their relations. To begin this process is to open 'a discourse' for a motherhood which is positioned without one, which is expressed as 'a need for an ethics for this "second sex" in its 'reawakening'.(25)

Kristeva's second question echoes Freud and Spinoza, in asking 'Are women subject to ethics?'.(26) We can take this question to mean are women good enough to meet the criteria of being called ethical agents, can they become fully aware of what is at stake in making ethical choices (ie are they rational enough). The problem of denying women status as ethical agents is that it casts doubt on the extent to which any agent can be said to be fully rational and/or ethical, and still qualify as an agent. In other words the question of women has been fundamental to the development of philosophical theories of ethics, and the way in which this 'problem' is variously negotiated gives us insight into the way identity is assumed to be structured.

We could also interpret this question as asking to what extent women are subjected to ethics - as schemas they did not devise and which are manifest as sacrifice, subjugation and distortion. In the very broaching of this question we recognise an implicit challenge to the ethical framework as a whole. If such a framework valorises freedom and equality for all individuals, yet simultaneously demands that the criteria for achieving

those aims be those generally associated with that which has been coded as masculine - a capacity for abstraction, an ability to compete in the public arena for example, then a fundamental contradiction is thrown up which the framework will find it difficult to sustain. In naming ethics as its concern it stands opposed to inequality between individuals, while at the same time demanding that certain qualities be promoted at the expense of others, leading to a disparity between the sexes.

A particular example of such contradiction is found in Rousseau's attempts to negotiate ethics and a force coded as feminine. In The Discourse on Inequality and in The Social Contract,(27) nature is seen to be in the past (a primitive idyll left behind), but also in the future (as the possible state of 'true human nature' still to be attained). Nature is characterised as feminine, so that in both aspects it is given a moral and maternal figuring. Nature is the mother who 'hides the weapons of science from a child', attempting to restrain men from the abuse of the natural by the scientific.

> Let men learn for once that nature would have preserved them from science, as a mother snatches a dangerous weapon from the hands of her child. Let them know that all the secrets she hides are so many evils from which she protects them, and that the very difficulty they find in acquiring knowledge is not the least of her bounty towards them.'(28)

It is also women who are 'ahead' of men in terms of moral virtue, providing an ideal to aim for. The women of Geneva, 'chaste guardians of our morals', will act as exemplars for future morality.(29)
So as nature, women epitomise a capacity for disorder which must be tamed. But in their very lack of reason, they are somewhat 'free' from the

corrupting influence of culture, and in this innocent role, provide, through their difference, a symbolic reminder both of what was and what will be in Rousseau's texts.

Except, of course, this process is built on positioning women not only as differing, but also as pre- and post- culture or reason. In this role, they present a danger to the kind of egalitarian morality Rousseau is seeking to establish. Women also remind the harmony of the social sphere (where all wills should be directed towards the continuance of the social contract), of the unruly and equivocal emotions, the partiality of maternal affections, and the private realm which diverts the citizen from the general will of the state. But Rousseau cannot dispense with motherhood as this is, necessarily, what will provide future citizens. Mothers are, further, charged with the responsibility of bringing up the future citizens, teaching them restraint and control, which means the mothers have to be bearers of the values of the state. And yet how can they do this, being both already moral, and yet not moral enough?

Rousseau is faced with this problem too, in grappling with the question of education for girls, in Emile.(30) Should autonomous individuality be allowed to girls? If it is, they will become 'authoritative', in possession of reason, and so refuse to be properly submissive and feminine. If they are uneducated, they will be unsuitable companions for men, untutored in the requirements of femininity. So the moral dilemma continues. Rousseau uses the illustation of the Spartan mother who is able to subordinate maternal feeling (her particular affection for her sons) to the interests of the state (in being told of her sons's deaths, she sternly demands to know the outcome of the battle as a more important detail), as a moral exemplar.(31) And yet, this version of rationality would also be the

perversion of what is 'natural' about women for Rousseau; their maternal instinct. Rousseau wants to establish a social contract which could promote equality for all, (and so be moral) making the criteria for such a contract the rational ability to understand and keep such a contract (the moral individual as it basis). And yet he is forced to disallow this ability to women, as they are both prior to and beyond such morality. It is not women who make this contract. As Genevieve Lloyd and Carole Pateman[32] show, the social contract 'disguises a sexual contract' which can only be exposed by forcing the contradictions it presents, to illuminate the framework of such thought.

Another illustration of this paradox is found in the famous passage from Freud which draws attention to 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Differences of the Sexes':[33]

> I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that the level of what is ethically normal is different in women from what it is in men. Their superego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Characteristics which critics of every epoch have brought up against women - that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the greater exigencies of life, that they are more readily influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility - all these would be amply accounted for in the formation of the superego which we have inferred above.[34]

Again, we find the question of the relevance of sexual difference to ethics being raised. Is it vitally important to maintain it (whether this is in the interests of excluding women as inadequate, or to promote difference in order to argue for specificity), or should difference be subordinate to an argument for equality and universality? This debate is significant in considering maternity, because if sexual difference is irrelevant,

maternity can have no place in discussions of ethics.

Freud's speculation on the ethical inequality of men and women points to the contradiction inherent in, on the one hand, sustaining universal ethical norms or laws, and, on the other, positing determining differences between men and women. Because Freud maintains different development patterns for men and women, it is logical in this context to identify different apprehensions of ethics. The next step is then to see women's apprehension as inferior or defective. But as with Rousseau, when we examine the criteria of neutral ethics assumed in this passage, it turns out to be a capacity for acting in such a way as to be free of emotional 'distraction', impersonal and abstractly judgemental, capacities which are then correlated with masculine characteristics. This legacy of the Enlightenment, which manifests itself in liberal moral structures, emphasizes individual moral choice at the expense of a morality with history or histories, i.e. one which can expose networks of power. Such relations of power are occluded if the neutrality of the ethical agent is the sole focus.

But is Freud to be accused of merely duplicating prejudice here? He places ethics in the realm of the superego, demanding a certain repression of forces in order to be able to articulate the universality to which traditional ethics has appeal. But in this extract the question of difference introduces a threat to this universality by suggesting a prior figuration of difference, splitting the possibility of rational ethicality through not only sexual difference but also via the forces of the

unconscious. Freud's text 'exceeds' itself here, caught between orthodoxy and radicality.

In negotiating the spectre of determinism raised herein, we can provisionally see the relocation of ethicality from the prime centre of the social superego to the very margins of this arena of rationality. Here we find a self no longer immune to doubt, but opened to the limitations as well as the socially defined powers of a sovereign subject.

Kristeva identifies such practices as a generalised dissent, practice as the frontier at which ethicality is developed. She writes: 'The ethics that develops in the process of negativity's unfolding is not the kind of 'ethics' which consists in obedience to laws'.(35) Here she seems to be suggesting that the location of ethicality is no longer adequately situated in the reformulation and attempted perfection of codes of behaviour, rules and laws. Unless the disruptive traces of the subject, constantly being rewritten in its processes, can also be accounted for, these projects are destined to keep re-treading the same ground. The constant transgression and renewal of positioning in relation to the process of signification gives onto the possibility of considering new practices, forged at the very boundaries of thinking.

What qualifies this practice to be called ethical? In terms of a generalised analysis of the crisis thrown up by modernity, we can recognise a certain bankruptcy in pursuing narrowly rationalist versions of ethics. At its most extreme, we have seen rationalising, totalising moves produce atrocities in its name, the most hyper-paranoic attempts to excise

difference and homogenise identity.(36) A resistance to such formats does not invalidate the whole process of thinking but rather indicates that the vitality of theorising productive and fulfilling relations must be re-conceptualised. Far from heralding the gloomy celebration of nihilism, such a conceptual shift engenders an event of ethical magnitude. Such an event is intertwined with, though not reducible to, a feminist project of reappraisal.

Kristeva finds in maternity the metaphoric expression of the above boundary location of ethicality, which is given the force of subversion but as embodied in the figuring of the feminine/maternal. Maternity connotes a possible irruption into and interruption of the Symbolic, centrally placed, yet disruptive, the disturbances of stasis and dynamism, cyclical/monumental time and discursive/grammatical time. In 'Stabat Mater', the poetic, lefthand (sinister?) 'other' side of the text irrupts into the historical and chronological mapping of motherhood. This textual move aspires to a writing of the metaphoric mother, positioned as a body in signification and yet already split, separated, pleasuring; 'the heterogeneity not subsumed under any law'.(37) A space is opened for different subjective possibilities, yet retaining the specificity of women.

> Now, if a contemporary ethics is no longer seen as being the same as morality; if ethics amounts to not avoiding the embarassing and inevitable problematics of the law but giving it flesh, language, jouissance - in that case its reformulation demands the contribution of women.(38)

This 'heretical ethics' is not based upon avoiding the law, but enriching it through the excessive re-presentation of the feminine to the aridity of

the law. If positionality is in effect a co-operation with the conditions of historical and cultural legislation concerning subjectivity, there is nothing immutable about such a process, it must be open to re-interpretation.

However, according to Kristeva, the positionality which may lead to a metaphysical hypostatisation of Woman is to be found in feminist discourse too. This is perhaps what leads her to be unnecessarily harsh on the variety of feminist positions which do not coincide with her own; a fear of the reintroduction of the essentialist subject which has led women to 'sacrifice or violence'. If this is a challenge to feminist theory, is it the kind of critique which feminist theory needs? Many feminist writers on Kristeva find her scathing attacks on feminism uncomfortable, especially when they seem to emanate from a position apparently as the 'queen of theory' which gives her the powerful role of (masculine) critic.(39) Ultimately they reluctantly part company from her, and her 'maternal' influence, in order to seek a more palatable version of feminist solidarity. Kristeva is proposing to occupy both the position of feminine disrupter of the symbolic order, and cultural commentator, and she seems to resort to the latter more frequently. But I do not think Kristeva's work is exhausted by a hasty dismissal, and it may be as necessary to attend to her work as to the other 'mothers' from whom much can be learned, if only in dissenting, challenging dialogue. 'Women doubtless reproduce amongst themselves the strange gamut of forgotten body relationships with their mothers...'(40)

Remaining with the subversive elements of Kristeva's texts for the time being, I would suggest that in 'Stabat Mater' we do find a feminist approach to the body (the maternal body) which constitutes a potential rethinking of corporeality in keeping with a radical perspective on difference; for example as outlined by Rosi Braidotti (although she is later critical of Kristeva in this text);

> ...the body thus defined cannot be reduced to the biological, nor can it be confined to social conditioning. In a new form of 'corporeal materialism', the body is seen as an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces; it is a surface where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed; it is a construction that transforms and capitalises on energies of a heteronomous and discontinuous nature. The body is not an essence, and therefore not an anatomical destiny...(41)

It is clear that Kristeva is not dealing with an ontological reduction of woman to the maternal, and nor is she subordinating the specificity of women to the more general principle of dissidence or subversion which includes revolutionaries and the avant garde.

> There might doubtless be a way to approach the obscure place that maternity constitutes for a woman... one might equally try to see more clearly into the incredible construction of the maternal which the West elaborates through the Virgin...
> Although it concerns every woman's body, the heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of nature and culture) and the child's arrival (which extracts a woman from her unity and gives her a possibility - not a certainty - of access to the other, of ethics).(42)

In terms of such a possible access to the other, of Kristeva's heretical ethics, we need to read this aspect of the text in conjunction with its 'other' hand, where she writes of the 'abyss' of inaccessibility, separation, and the impossible, irredeemable otherness of the other, between and within. This consititutes the divisional spatiality of a

maternal figuring...'and consequently a division of language...'.[43] But is this version of maternity to be merely a constant disruption, an anarchic 'demented jouissance?'.[44] The question which must be taken up is the extent to which such versions might permeate and challenge the borders of languages of representation, how the very conditions are to be made flexible enough to facilitate this transformation.

> Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under the veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible ...wisps of words, droplets of sentences...take refuge in tones to recover an underwater, trans-verbal communication between bodies...(45)

In Kristeva's essay 'Motherhood according to Bellini',[46] she seems to write of or from the mother without according any specific subject identity to the mother; maternity becomes a process in which 'no one is present', 'it happens but I'm not there'. In Elizabeth Grosz's terms,[47] it seems that Kristeva is prepared to deny any form of agency being present in maternity in order to escape the charge of essentialism, to the point that it becomes 'ludicrous'. Grosz sees Kristeva refusing to accord a sex to the maternal body and as a result acceding to the biological and physiological telos of a 'natural' species-memory. It seems as if the relinquishment of a subject category puts the notion of motherhood into a more longterm biological narrative, as an intrumental requirement of reproduction. In this sense the mother as agent seems to be written out, and she becomes merely an agent for the generation of the species.

But the primary reason for Kristeva's denial of essential identity is as part of her critique of an epistemic basis upon which ethics and - in this essay - aesthetic judgements are founded. The notion of representation

which resides in a mimetic figuration of that which is taken to be by definition 'true', is undermined by forces which threaten to invade both the objects of representation and the subject who is apparently 'mastering' them through representation. The key term in her essay is 'reproduction', which works co-extensively in the context of both painting and maternity. What is at stake in 'reproducing' the conditions which preceded a moment of reproduction? How do these conditions -as they are symbolically understood - start to change culturally and historically?

Kristeva is concerned to confront those forces which may present motherhood as a serene and untroubled icon - in fact, as the epitome of identity, frozen and perfect in its capacity to regulate chaos and present a respite from the uncertainties of dynamic processes, and the recurring hints of failure to present these processes in a stable or static way. The idealisation of motherhood is what makes the Madonna 'fit' to be the mother of the Son of God; she makes the space to allow transitivity between divine and human, at the expense of her own self.

> A quite revealing Orthodox conception of the Virgin defines her as <u>ergasterion</u> - privileged space, living area, ladder (of Jacob), or door (of the Temple, in Ezekiel's vision) - dwelling, in short; she is seen as union, a contact without gap, without separation, and these functions make of her a metaphor for the Holy Ghost.(48)

There has to be 'someone' placed in this filter, according to the demands of this kind of economy; a powerful figure who can be accorded the capacity to master and control the whole process. Yet in being accorded this power the figure of the mother is being manipulated as 'a thoroughfare'. But it seems without this figure, identity would crumble, 'every speaker would be

led to conceive of its Being in relation to some void, a nothingness asymetrically opposed to this Being, a permanent threat against first its mastery and ultimately its stability'.(49)

How necessary is the frozen image of perfect motherhood to this process? Kristeva writes of Christianity's need to position a figure in the dangerous (as it is perceived) moment of splitting, construed as 'the threshold of nature and culture' which presents a threat to social coherence with its 'psychotic tendencies' - and it places the mother there. The consequences of this particular placing are

a) the sacrifice of motherhood to be the lodestone of the spiritual/social community, holding it together at the woman's expense, and

b) an implicit recognition of hazardous psychotic splitting, in the very need to ensure against it.

In identifying this process, Kristeva is caught in a double bind; if she says 'no one is there' in this curious site, she is capitulating to the sacrifice of the mother. If she defends the mother against this symbolic sacrifice she is collaborating in presenting her as a hypostatised identity, essentialised and manipulated as such.

However, Kristeva also acknowledges an 'other' codification of maternity, the excessive forces which act against the constraints of identity in a different way. These forces are to be contrasted with a pathological fear of the void from which the mother came to stand as a symbolic shield, and the excessive forces which are not a void but are not representable in the terms of the proper name either.

> How can we verbalise this pre-linguistic, unrepresentable memory? Heraclitus' flux, Epicurus' atoms, the whirling dust of cabalic, Arab and Indian mystics and the stippled drawings of psychedelics - all seem better metaphors than the theories of Being, the logos and its laws.(50)

Gesturing toward these forces allows Kristeva to negotiate the either/or dilemma of the representation of maternity, as here she can indicate a notion of the maternal space which is not a void, but nor is it an identity of Being. The excess of maternal jouissance is symbolically an archaic memory which works as a kind of thread or fault between metaphysics.

We must note at this point that having created this space of articulation, Kristeva seems to return to the discourse of 'drives and instincts', a trap she could have avoided if she had once again acknowledged the symbolic network these notions must inhabit. It seems curious to reinstate biology as the 'real' when she had previously been so cautious to point out how the process of signification does not allow us to name this kind of ground other than as a kind of absence.

This move is particularly odd when she is using her whole argument to precisely question the relations of representation. Should we read this as the fatal flaw in Kristeva's work (it occurs in a number of places)? Or should we take as given that when she writes of biology she realises its mediation through a certain <u>representation</u> of biology? In certain places she seems to indicate this is what she means, but the passages are dense and unclear. It appears that she is writing not of an actual biological teleology, but the inscription of such a 'programme' into the social narrative of the journey from nature to culture.

But this discussion of maternity cannot be read in isolation from the rest of the piece. Kristeva is concerned with an analysis of Bellini's use of colour which, in its 'luminous density' allows her to give a phenomenological reading of the visible which reveals the hiddenness of its dimensions; the 'volume' of light which seems to 'open out infinitely to another spatiality'.(51) In other words, she is seeking the conditions of possibility of presentation, even at the very 'limits of representation'.(52) In a similar way in her piece on Giotto and the maternal, which also considers the 'massive irruption of bright colours', 'chromatic differences that throb into a third dimension',(53) she is attempting to articulate the way in which the conditions of representation are unsettled as the simultaneous moment of their presentation. The force of colour is equivalent to the excess of jouissance which disrupts the formalistic elements of the painting as the axes of space and time.

If Kristeva is more interested in the disruption of representation which Bellini's use of colour effects, we must still ask what connection is to be made between the figural representation of the Madonna and the force of the excess of maternal jouissance. Although it is not explicit, Kristeva is pointing out that the conditions of representation are shifting and changeable forces which, if they are somehow made more open, can allow for shifts in the particular representations which emerge from them. With reference to the maternal body, the openness would be an articulation of the debt which is owed to this hidden function.

> ...craftsmen of Western art reveal better than anyone else the artist's debt to the maternal body and/or motherhood's entry into symbolic existence...A unique biographical experience and an uncommon, historical intersection of pagan-Orientalism with sacred Christianity and incipient humanism was perhaps needed for Bellini's brush to retain the traces of a marginal experience, through and across which a maternal body might recognise its own, otherwise inexpressible in our culture.(54)

If Kristeva allows that the marginal experience must be that which can be re-invented in the processes of creativity (given the specificity of each realisation), then this reinvention is a kind of breaching of the sacred, an interruption in the continuity of representation of its own mirror held up (in this case) to the Madonna and to motherhood in general (in its symbolism). Bellini's painting testifies to this event. The profanation of the sacred - the representation of what is constituted as divine - would correspond to Kristeva's notion of the opening of the space of maternal jouissance, which is not merely a space outlined or waiting to be represented. As such, it could only mark that which is not present or presence as a self. The sacred is not a place replete with meanings, it is a withdrawal, signed by what has passed - and as such it makes a space for possible presentations of the sacred in different forms. If new understandings of difference both require and indict the process of representation, we can see an example in Bellini's work, as Kristeva draws attention to it, of the way this might function. In this way, I think Kristeva's understanding of the relation of the sacred and representation captures the same notion which Irigaray describes in terms of 'women becoming divine for themselves', an opportunity to reconsider the processes of idealisation and creativity.(55)

Another way to account for this process is given by Jean-Luc Nancy in his essay 'Of Divine Places'.

> Jean-Marie Pontevia once wrote: 'The cult of the Virgin is one of the major events in Western history. It is certainly an event, whose principle phases are datable, and it is a major event, because it may well perhaps be the last example in the West of the birth of a divinity'. I propose to add that this last example perhaps signifies..that a divine birth is always possible, and that it is therefore still possible. But at the same time it means that such a birth bears no relation to a 'return', a restoration or a reinvention of the divine - quite the opposite...the sacred cannot be reinvented. The divinity born in the figure of the Virgin was in no way the return or reincarnation of a former divinity. It was the divinity of a new age; of a new age of painting and of woman..It was a divine sign opposed to God. (56)

We can see in this process the possibility Irigaray also seeks. But it is not achieved in the name of directly correlative biological processes, simplistically 'represented' by colour densities. Kristeva is also at pains to indicate the ideological networks which go to make up conceptions of value (both 'biology' and 'representation' too) - with attention to the specificity of Bellini and Giotto, as well as to the present day. What this points to is an articulation of jouissance as conveyed through the understanding of Giotto or Bellini, in the context of their conception of the sacred - which must refer us to the particular processes of representation. Although she does not stress this strongly enough, there is a means to activate this process in a feminist context.

But as Jane Gallop teasingly suggests, Kristeva is all too ready to occupy the position of phallic mother - the powerful mother figure who possesses knowledge and is in control of signifying processes. She identifies the means of an emancipatory mode of thinking the maternal/feminine, but fills up the content of this process with her own analysis of male artists, dramatising her own position, and showing her command of the process. Whether she is more or less successful, Irigaray wishes to leave this space

free for women to situate their own access to the divine. Kristeva has already exposed the conditions of this process, the exercising of creativity as a means to power, as fraudulent, if it means thinking one is invincible (and witness her criticisms of feminists who might presume this). She writes in many places of the new mode of being that might be opened up as vunerability.

> ...the maternal function can be the apprenticeship of modesty and of a permanent calling into question; and if a woman lives maternity and her artists work thus, far from being a totalising Mother-Goddess, she is rather a locus of vulnerability, of calling into question oneself and of languages'.(57)

As we have seen, the one rare location we find evidence of this vulnerability is in the 'poetic' side of 'Stabat Mater', where Kristeva calls herself into question in and against her text which speaks of motherhood. We can also see her admission of vulnerability in her problematising of the identity of the analyst, which is to say, as she herself is an analyst, a problematising of her own position. Nevertheless, her relations to and her writing concerning other women is perhaps not tentative enough. There is a hint of possibilities in the following passage:

> Nevertheless, androgynous paradise and, in another way, lesbian loves comprise the delightful arena of a neutralised, filtered libido, devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculine sexuality. Light touches, caresses, barely distinct images fading one into the other, growing dim or veiled without bright flashes into the mellowness of a dissolution, a liquefaction, a merger...It evokes the loving dialogue of the pregnant woman with the fruit, barely distinct from her, that shelters in her womb. Or the light rumble of soft skins that are irridescent not from desire but from that opening-closing, blossoming-wilting, an in-between hardly established that suddenly collapses in the same warmth, that slumbers or wakens within the embrace of the baby and its nourishing mother. Skin; mouth; empty, excited, or the filled opening of lips - they coat such emanations, drain their tension, and, beyond

> any aggressive breakthrough, float, cradle, drug. Relaxation of consciousness, daydream, language that is neither dialectial nor rhetorical, but peace or eclipse: nirvana, intoxication and silence.(58)

The forms of signification drawn upon in both Kristeva's and Irigaray's work in this respect correspond to what might be called 'syntax morphology'; the (hypothetical) translation of a language of excess, of the equivocal borders and fissures of the edges of the body, and of the 'differences' between names and bodies. Although every language might be said to contain these possibilities, it is the urgency of a feminist project to develop this language of sensibility which gives it an ethical instantiation. As such, it cannot be completely recuperated into an understanding which would equal its control, nor into systems of representation and knowledge. The morphology, sensibility and proximity which it evokes is fragile and tentative, and yet offers a challenge to the still destructive circuits which it indicts.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION

So far, I have identified a certain need to approach a reading of philosophy from a perspective which can allow a critique of some of its presuppositions and yet not situate itself wholly outside that tradition. In order to elaborate on this notion I have borrowed from psychoanalysis resources of analytic interpretation and therapy, to conduct an analysis of the subject as other than wholly self-present, and an analysis of 'the unconscious' of philosophy. This analysis is conducted with a view to proposing ways of understanding difference which will also be restorative rather than destructive, a strange version of 'therapy'.

The disruptive effect of a feminine/maternal force has been established, even when this force is theorised in the context of phenomenology and psychoanalysis. The feminine corresponds to an excess which is capable of overreaching the intentional analysis of desire and the structure of the desiring subject. This is a codification of the feminine which does not exhaust its codification, but extends it. 'The feminine' is taken up strategic ally to provoke questions of sexual difference in the context of philosophy. The potential of such a strategy concerns signification, meaning and language, but in an indirect, mimetically skewed and mimicking fashion. This version of signification may be extended to develop an 'ethical language' which can allow for the articulation of the feminine.

If scepticism occupies a bizarrely anti-philosophical position with respect to philosophy, it has an equally venerable ancestry within that tradition. This well-known paradox may be framed thus: 'Scepticism may be understood

as an expression of an extreme form of dissatisfaction with the logos in its philosophical form. Scepticism tries to evade philosophy; but is there any logos-free space where it could settle to enjoy a human life?'(1) If thinking is continually condemned to a movement of imprisonment, encompassing and repulsing, 'Which experiences, adventures of the mind, or events of history do not permit the gathering of logos to enclose them within its horizons?'.(2) How are we to find a strategy of critique which is not merely repetition of the same, but manages to avoid the infinite regress of a scepticism forced to be sceptical of its own position? This is the problematic which faces those thinkers who seek to reproach philosophy for what it has repressed or left out, and to reproach it in the name of a legitimate cause, and yet this contaminates the basis of an appeal to legimation in reproaching philosophy. In his essay 'Presentation' on Levinas, Adrian Pepperzak calls this a problematic of evasion. How can we dodge philosophical containment while at the same time utilising its resources to articulate otherness? Engaging in this 'impossible' enterprise is to offer an ethical reproach to philosophy, the conditions of this reproach being a determination to avoid quietism or an abdication of any concerns with philosophical thinking. In this study, I have conducted this reproach in respect of contemporary feminist concerns, and engaging the resources of phenomenology, feminist theory and theology to elaborate its possibility.

So is this a reinstatement of a metalevel concern? Where can this level be found to allow a critique of all other critiques? Is it either too naive a demand or self-refuting in its internal contradiction?
The disjunct between the exposing of a moment of scepticism and its own

refutation indicates a dislocation, a non-synchronised fault or fracture which may make a new space for such a reading to take place. This reading will show an awareness of non-coincidence which would not be a weakness, simultaneously naive and too sophisticated in its interpretation.

The questioning of ontology belongs to an immense volume of work which patiently uncovers the conflation of singularity, identity and presence, and the connection to and from the power structures which not only create such formations but maintain them as the most successful means of sustaining the status quo. The totalitarian thinking which occludes difference in the name of a more coherent theorisation of unity is not confined to those political regimes more immediately identifiable as repressive, but also to the liberal framework which argues for equality at the expense of celebrating difference. If feminist theory has been concerned to question identity in the context of post-modernist thinking, it is in order to analyse the alignment of presence and power. But the recent 'return to the subject' in philosophical theory, which is heralded as the chance to re-consider questions of ethics and political responsibility now that subjectivity has been unsettled from its complacent fixity, is not really new for feminist theory, in that it has sought to preserve some version of subjectivity.

In the work of the thinkers I have examined in this study, there are consistent attempts to rethink a mode of being which is not recuperable under orthodox categories of subjectivity, and in this context, the site of the body has been a persistent preoccupation. Despite the apparently different terrains which these thinkers occupy, they share a fundamental

proccupation with the apparent determination of otherness as a problem for the epistemologically and ontologically grounded subject. Their analyses may be said to be ethical in that they stir up once again the various oscillations between poles of unity/multiplicity, masculine/feminine, I/other, where such oscillations have generally resolved into the first term coming to take precedence over the second. The process of stirring up these solidifications allows at least the potential for a reconceptualisation of identities, as well as relations between them, but not at the expense of dispensing with them altogether. Instead, we are introduced to a realm of equivocation in a provocative flouting of the principle of non-contradiction. How can one thing be and not be at the same time? But as I have suggested, it is only if this ambiguity is allowed that we can come to understand the complex operations of difference in any way other than a reductive and reducing fashion. Hence such thinkers attempt to sustain an equivocal position with respect to not only an intersubjective dimension, but also with respect to a dimension of transcendence.

> This simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and trancendence, tangency of the avowable and the unavowable, constitutes the originality of the erotic, which in this sense, is the equivocal par excellence'.(3)

> A constant alteration between time and its "truth", identity and its loss, history and the timeless, signless extra-phenomenal things which produce it. An impossible dialectic: a permanent alteration: never one without the other.(4)

A potential is opened by Levinas' claim for 'ethics as first philosophy'.(5) This is a radical dimension of infinity as absence, which could recast questions of sexual difference in different terms. This

potential is matched by the attempts of Kristeva and Irigaray to re-interpret sexual difference through the resources of signification, Kristeva through 'heretical ethics' and Irigaray through the female imaginary, as a way of revealing the hidden aspects of the feminine/maternal.

The question which has preoccupied us here may be stated simply: is the ethical relation one of neutrality, ultimately an understanding of the Other as a threshold to a sexually unmarked infinity, or is the ethical relation already and irremediably sexed - the other as feminine? This is not just a question for feminists, but accords with attempts to think ethics as a relation to Being as neutral or beings as sexed and situated. The feminist problematic is still related to this larger scale 'philosophical' dilemma; perhaps uniquely though in the history of philosophy, it is at the heart of the ethical agenda. Since Levinas and Merleau-Ponty insist upon the sexual and embodied nature of any ethical agent, feminist theory can engage with the implications of this insistence. As we have seen, Kristeva and Irigaray take up this possibility for feminist theory, although it is Irigaray who presents the most comprehensive and optimistic political implications for a feminist understanding of 'an ethics of the passions', an embodied, experiential ethicality which acknowledges the vicissitudes of sexual difference and draws this possibility to the attention of the discipline of philosophy.

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NOTES

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. The primary writers I include in this broad generalisation are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Other authors would include Jean-Luc Nancy, Phil ippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Sarah Kofman and Monique Wittig. I intend to indicate the context of post-war critical theory which takes up questions concerning power, language and desire in the wake of Nietzsche, Kojeve's lectures on Hegel, Sartrean existentialism, structuralist theories of language and Lacanian readings of Freud. For fuller characterisations of the 'French intellectual scene' and post-modernism, see for example Vincent Descombes Modern French Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, 1980. For a critical examination of subjectivity in this context, see Peter Dews (1987). The theoretical framework may still be concerned with ethics as a problematic, but not necessarily with the development of ethics.

2. For example, see R.M. Hare The Language of Morals, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952, and work which considers specific problems within ethics eg. abortion, euthanasia, suicide, animal rights, promising etc. An opposing view is taken in the context of 'ordinary language' philosophy after A.J. Ayer, which has led to the devaluing of ethics as a discipline, as empirically neither verifiable nor falsifiable, but expressive of emotion, or the subordination of ethics to questions about the philosophy of mind and/or philosophy of language.

3. For critiques of reason and autonomy which nevertheless hold on to such notions as ethically or politically necessary for the development of a critical theory which can have some purchase, see the work of the Frankfurt School and of Gadamer and Habermas (Dews, 1987).

4. See for example Genevieve Lloyd (1986), Jean Grimshaw (1986), Sarah Kofman, Elshtain (1986), Susan Okin (1980), Clark and Lange (1979) etc. for feminist critiques of the apparent neutrality of reason and autonomy in the history of philosophy.

5. See the work of Onora O'Neill for example, for feminist defences of Kantian ideals of equality and autonomy.

6. The philosophical canon is reflected by the philosophers taught on the majority of syllabuses in contemporary philosophy departments, e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Rousseau, Hume, Locke, Descartes, Sartre etc.

7. Kant Critique of Pure Reason. p. 597.

8. Hume is most often held to be a counter position to the alignment of reason and ethicality, epitomised by his statement 'Reason is the slave to the passions'. But as Lloyd (1986) indicates, Hume makes a

distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' passions, whereby 'strong' passions are the capacity for public interest, deliberation and the development of 'virtue'. In the long run, such passions correspond to the preservation of society, public justice and human progress, in opposition to the 'private' morality of sentiment and particular affections. This opposition corresponds to the public/private distinction and the division of the sexes.

9. In the context of contemporary feminist theory, questions have been raised about 'the feminine' in language as another example of (male) philosophers appropriating and recuperating the critical force of this notion. See Jardine (1985), Braidotti (1990), Allen and Young (1989). 'The feminine' may be radically disruptive and unrecuperable as a force within the text, as via its very non-determination as an ultimate heterogeneity it undermines identity thinking: see David Krell Postponements, woman, sensuality and death in Nietzsche, Bloomington, Indiana University Press. 1986. or Derrida's Spurs (1979), or Graybeal (1989) for this view. But it is not automatically feminist; the feminist implications need to be developed in the context of the paradox between women's experience and the feminine as a radical force of negativity. It is the work of Irigaray, for example, which develops this paradox further.

10. I will argue that while Luce Irigaray's work may be called explicitly feminist, there are feminist implications in the work of Julia Kristeva which can be developed and expanded. For objections to this view see Grosz (1989), Jones (1985) or Stone (1986).

11. See Irigaray Éthique de la différence sexuelle, passim.

12. It may be objected that the possibility of developing an ethics for the future is implicitly teleological; and so has an implicit view of human nature and of progress towards an ideal. As Whitford (1991) points out, while the critical/sceptical perspective of Kristeva avoids the accusation of idealism or utopianism (as Kristeva seems to resist speculation or projection), Irigaray's work seems to be open to this charge.

13. For example, Plato's Republic begins by assuming fundamental inequalities between the inhabitants of the ideal state, Aristotle accepts that definitions of happiness and ways of life will differ: '...when it comes to saying in what happiness consists, opinions differ...Ethics. p.66), and Kant observes differences in his practical anthropology etc., but the overall aim is to overcome such differences.

14. The notion of identity as process will be expanded in later chapters, in the context of psychoanalytic theory.

15. See Moi in Brennan (ed) (1989).

CHAPTER 1

1. Focussing on The Second Sex and The Ethics of Ambiguity.

2. See The Second Sex, p. 16, where de Beauvoir writes; 'She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other.'

3. See Michèle Le Doeuff (1986) and (1990). Le Doeuff's position is that philosophy as a discipline has not explicitly excluded women from thinking or reasoning, but has established its boundaries in such a way as to focus on reason and knowledge, and to sustain a 'master-pupil' relation which corrsponds to masculine-feminine relations. It has also had recourse to the metaphor of 'the feminine' to sustain its position as 'master discourse', while simultaneously disavowing such a metaphor. However, she argues that a pluralising of the philosophical enterprise would allow women to engage in 'a collective form of philosophical work', so, like de Beauvoir, she is optimistic about women's capacities to overcome the constraints which place them as 'Other'.

4. See The Second Sex, p.91, where de Beauvoir writes;

   In our attempt to discover woman, we shall not reject certain contributions of biology, of psychoanalysis, and of historical materialism; but we shall hold that the body, the sexual life, and the resources of technology exist concretely for man only in so far as he grasps them in the total perspective of his existence.

5. See Michèle Le Doeuff (1980) for an account of this tension.

6. Second Sex, p. 28.

7. See Kristeva's essay 'Women's Time' in Moi (ed) (1986) for this notion of 'waves' of feminism.
   The first wave is supposed to be the struggle for equality on the same terms as men, the second is the argument in favour of difference, and the third is the negotion of the previous two positions. This characterisation of feminism is misleading in that it suggests each generation is a homogeneous body of thought, and that each generation successively 'overcomes' the previous one. Kristeva argues that she is not presenting an historical account and that the strands of thought can co-exist, but this point is often overlooked.

   'My usage of the word 'generation' implies less a chronology than a signifying space, a both corporeal and desiring mental space. So it can be argued that as of now a third attitude is possible, thus a third generation, which does not exclude - quite to the contrary - the parallel existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven with each other.' p.209.

8. Sartre's works were published in 1943 and 1960 respectively.

9. Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 8.

10. ibid., p.13.

11. For Kierkegaard's account of the paradox of existence as despair and dread, see The Sickness Unto Death or Fear and Trembling, for example.

12. See Jaspers, Buber and Marcel, for example. For a brief overview of different strands of existentialist thought see John Macquarrie Existentialism, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980.

13. Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 15.

14. ibid., p.17.

15. ibid.

16. ibid.

17. ibid., p.11.

18. See Paton (ed) Kant The Moral Law for a distinction between the pathological and the purity of the moral law, for example.

19. Ethics of Ambiguity, p.33.

20. ibid., p.105.

21. ibid., p.82.

22. ibid., p.48.

23. Michèle le Doeuff (1986).

24. ibid., p.279.

25. Second Sex, p.13.

26. ibid., p.15.

27. ibid., p.15.

28. Second Sex, p. 60.

29. Second Sex, p. 63.

30. See Monique Plaza 'Phallomorphic power and the psychology of woman', Ideology and Consciousness, 1978, no. 1, vol. 4, pp.6-7, for example:

'...nature does not speak the difference, it supplies indications which we interpret as a function of social relations. The individual does not have a "natural existence", he [sic] is always already socialised, including his "biological irreducibleness". We shall not find the

woman by eliminating the social from our questioning, because the social is always there, imposing its impressive construction...

See also Shulamith Firestone The Dialectic of Sex, New York, Bantam, 1970.

31. Lloyd (1986), Chapter 6.

32. ibid., p.102.

33. See Judith Butler 'Gendering the body; Beauvoir's philosophical contribution' in Garry and Pearsall (eds) (1989), pp.253-62.

34. ibid., p.249.

35. Ethics of Ambiguity, p.41.

36. Second Sex, p.66.

37. See Foucault (1980):

'...the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artifical unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning...'(p.154).

and Merleau Ponty (1968):

'The thickness of the body, far from rivalling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh.' (p.152). In 'making myself a world', Merleau-Ponty indicates, one is 'restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning...an expression of experience by experience which in particular clarifies the special domain of language' (p.155).

It seems that Foucault resists this possibility of judging, although Merleau-Ponty suggests it is the re-enactment of such meanings which can direct future possibilities of bodily meanings. However, as I suggest, this once again imputes some kind of rational choice to agents. However, Butler points out tensions in Foucault's work between the view of sexuality as an effect of the discourses of power in The History of Sexuality Vol. 1, and the materiality of the body in Herculine Barbin (1980).

38. See Butler 'Gendering the Body', in Garry and Pearsall (eds) (1987), p. 258.

39. For Butler this question seems to resolve itself in an arena of theatrical costuming, drag and the playful subversion of established gender identities through 'impersonation'. See Butler (1990), passim.

40. ibid, p. 256-7.

41. See Butler (1990).

42. See Derrida (1982), where he writes;

> '...what if we were to reach...the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating? The relationship would not be a-sexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise...I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each individual, whether he be classified as a man or a woman according to the criteria of usage'. (p. 76)

43. 'Interview with Simone de Beauvoir', Wenzel, (1989), p.11.

44. Second Sex, p. 718.

45. Significantly, de Beauvoir discusses her ambivalence concerning psychoanalysis in interviews later in life, acknowledging that she and Sartre did not really explore it in the '40s and '50s (see Alice Schwarzer Simone de Beauvoir Today: conversations 1972-82, London, Chatto and Windus, 1984). See Mitchell (1974), 'Part Two, Section II 'Transatlantic Psychoanalysis; the Feminists 1. Simone de Beauvoir' for a discussion of de Beauvoir's ambivalence, where Mitchell argues that de Beauvoir appreciates the insights of Freud for its 'psychology' but that from an existentialist perspective she is bound to reject Freud for the apparent determinism accorded to biology and for his stress on sexuality at the expense of 'other' aspects of existence.

46. Rosi Braidotti (1991), p. 140.

47. Butler (1990), p. 10.

CHAPTER 2

1. See Mitchell and Rose (eds) (1982), Brennan (1989) and Gallop (1982), for example, for a much fuller account of the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism. As my concern is to develop the ethical implications of these two areas of theory, I discuss some of the important implications of the mutual influence and criticisms each has on the other, but this account is not intended to be exhaustive.

2. See Grosz (1989), chapter 1.

3. Kristeva 'Women's Time' in Moi (ed) (1986), p.209.

4. Quoted in Whitford (ed)(1992).

5. See Jessica Benjamin (1988) for an analysis of feminism and psychoanalysis which focusses on the intersubjective relation of sexual difference. She argues that object relations psychoanalysis provides a way of negotiating the problems of domination/submission in relations between men and women. Her analysis corresponds to a Habermasian position in that it argues for an 'ideal speech situation' posited between the sexes, such that difference could engender mutual respect. However, I think she is able to reach this optimistic conclusion because she occludes or overrrides the intrapsychic divisions and splits and forces which would fundamentally undermine such a project. In a footnote she acknowledges such forces, but proposes to focus on the unified aspect of the subject. n discussing intersubjective and intrapsychic relations, she writes in a footnote:

> Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this discussion to propose a scheme for synthesizing the two approaches. The problem is that each focusses on different aspects of psychic experience which are too interdependent to be simply severed from one another. I am emphasizing intersubjectivity over intrapsychic theory because the latter is better developed and usually overshadows the former, not because I think one ought to preclude the other. (p.21)

See Grosz (1990) for a concise account of Kristeva and Irigaray's debt to Lacan. She writes:

> Kristeva and Irigaray share Lacan's broad anti-humanism, his commitment to the primacy of language in psychical life and his understanding of the necessarily sexualised position assumed by the subject in the symbolic. They share a familiarity with Freud's work, with texts of (largely) idealist philosophies, as well as as a background in Lacan's seminars. Both are practising psychoanalysts. Both are committed to developing analyses of the production of sexed subjectivity. Both focus on the relation obscured in Freud and Lacan's work - the mother-

child relation (for Kristeva) and the mother-daughter relation (for Irigaray)...Both affirm the fluid, polymorphous perverse status of libidinal drives and both evoke a series of sites of bodily pleasure capable of resisting the demands of the symbolic order. (p.149).

6. Kristeva (1981), p. 132.

7. We will see the implications for intentionality and desire in the next chaper in the context of phenomenology.

8. Gallop (1986), p.xii.

9. This claim will be explored in later chapters in the context of phenomenology as it is re-interpreted by Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. My argument for this psychoanalytic/phenomenological nexus for feminism is supported on both sides; Lacanian psychoanalysis acknowledges the influence of phenomenology in analysing the relation between the scopophilic field and intending acts of consciousness (which applies to sexual desire), and phenomenologists discuss sexuality and the erotic as part of intentionality. I hope to show how these perspectives are workable for feminist theory, in an ethical direction. Both Kristeva and Irigaray are familiar with the philosophical aspects of these theories.

10. The socio-symbolic is acknowledged to be 'masculine'. See Grosz (1990) for a feminist critique of Lacan.

11. See Butler (1990), Introduction, for a forceful account of this paradox.

12. Although this is Freud's phrase, it occurs in a number of feminist works on Lacan as a metaphor for feminine jouissance and the strategic position of woman (or 'the feminine') as other.

13. See Derrida (1978) and Krell (1986).

14. Lacan in Mitchell and Rose (eds) (1986), p.166.

15. Lacan, Écrits (1976), p.287.

16. Lacan in Mitchell and Rose (eds) (1986), p. 135.

17. ibid. p.147.

18. Moi (ed) (1988), p.118, and Whitford (ed) (1991) p.165.

19. ibid.

20. The Pythagorean table opposes ten sets of principles in pairs of contraries, thus:

Limit	Unlimited
Odd	Even
Unity	Plurality
Right	Left
Male	Female
Rest	Motion
Straight	Crooked
Light	Darkness
Good	Bad
Square	Oblong

This table is printed as an appendix to the Penguin edition of Aristotle's Ethics, with a note by Hugh Tredennick: 'The selection of these pairs seems rather capricious...but evidently there is a system of a sort; the first column is meant to exhibit order, unity and goodness, and the second the corresponding defects.' p.346, my emphasis.

21. Rose in Brennan (ed) (1989).

22. ibid.

23. Irigaray writes: 'Woman remains this nothing at all, this whole of nothing yet where each male (one) comes to seek the means to replenish resemblance to self (as) to same. And so she is displaced, yet until now it was not she who displaced herself' ('Volume-Fluidity' in Speculum p.227, retranslated in Whitford (ed) (1992), p.53.

24. Irigaray This Sex, p.150.

25. Speculum and Éthique de la différence sexuelle are the texts which engage most explicitly with philosophy.

26. The title of the first section of Speculum which deals with Freud.

27. See 'The Power of Discourse', This Sex, where Irigaray writes:

...the domination of the philosophical logos stems in large part from its power to reduce all others to the economy of the same. The teleologically constructed project it takes on is always also a project of diversion, deflection, reduction of the Other to the Same. And, in its greatest generality perhaps, from its power to eradicate the difference between the sexes in systems that are self-representative of a 'masculine subject'... (p.76).

28. In Éthique de la différence sexuelle Irigaray writes:

Wonder (admiration, in Descartes' terms) might allow them (the sexes) to retain an autonomy based on their difference, and give them a space of freedom or attraction, a possibility of separation or alliance. Whitford (ed) (1991), (p. 173) and Moi (ed) (1988), p. 124.

29. In This Sex Irigaray writes:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path', the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. (p.76).

See also the rest of this essay, and Ethique de la différence sexuelle, passim, for Irigaray's characterisation of this project as ethical or political.

30. Broadly speaking, this shift is from the 'scientific' discourse of linguistics and Marxism(the topics of structural linguistics and Maoist Marxist theory are the main themes of Revolution in Poetic Language and About Chinese Women) towards topics such as romantic love, the abject and melancholia in keeping with Kristeva's deepening involvement in psychoanalysis.

31. See Tales of Love and Desire in Language respectively for these directions.

32. Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language, p. 110.

33. ibid., p. 113.

34. ibid., p. 116.

35. This analysis of the Hegelian dialectic is also found in Derrida, in the attempt to resist the idealism and monism implied by the Hegelian system. And yet Hegel is vital to the analysis of identity and difference. See Glas, and 'From Restricted to General Economy; a Hegelianism without reserve' in Writing and Difference, for example. The view of Hegel's philosophy as totalising and implying totality is shared by Levinas. See Wyschogrod (1974), Chapter 6.

36. John Lechte (1990) writes:

'On 7 November 1955, Jacques Lacan - doctor of medecine, psychoanalyst, friend of surrealism - 'officially announced his famous 'return to Freud' in a paper given at a neuro-psychiatric clinic in Vienna'.

See 'The Freudian thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis', Lacan Ecrits (1977), pp.114-45.

37. This symbolic structure is, in addition, marked as masculine. Lacan writes:

'It is the name-of-the-father that we must recognise as the support of the symbolic function, which, from the dawn of history has identified his person with the figure of the law'. (Ecrits, p.67).

See Whitford (1988) and (1990) for a fuller account of the imaginary in Irigaray's work. In This Sex, Irigaray writes:

if the female imaginary were to deploy itself, if it could bring itself into play otherwise than as scraps, debris, would it represent itself, even so, in the form of one universe? Would it even be volume instead of surface?No.(p30).

Kristeva says in an interview (1984):

(I wanted to) make more detailed the archaic stages preceding the mirror stage because I think that the grasping of the image by the child is the result of a whole process. And this process can be called imaginary, but not in the specular sense of the word because it passes through voice, taste, skin, and so on, all the senses, yet doesn't necessarily mobilise sight. (p.22-3)

38. Kristeva 'The Ethics of Linguistics' in Desire in Language, pp. 23-36.

39. ibid., p.24.

40. See Noam Chomsky Cartesian Linguistics, a chapter in the history of rationalist thought. New York, Harper and Row, 1966.

41. Moi (ed) (1989), p.91.

42. The influence of Husserlian phenomenology and the critique of the transcendental unity of consciousness will be developed in the next chapter. See Husserl Cartesian Meditations.

43. Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language, p. 31.

44. ibid., p. 32.

45. Wyschogrod (1990), p. 170.

46. Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language, p.25.

47. ibid.

48. ibid.

49. ibid., p. 68.

50. Rousseau (1965).

51. Pascal (1987).

52. Many critics of Kristeva make these points. See Butler (1989), Grosz (1989).

53. Plato Timaeus.

54. Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language p.26.

55. ibid.

CHAPTER 3

1. Irigaray Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p. 115.

2. ibid, p.121.

3. See Grosz (1989), pp.95-7, Butler (1989) and Eléanor Kuykendal's essay 'Questions for Kristeva's ethics of linguistics' in Allen and Young (eds), (1989), pp.180-94.

4. See Chapter 2, note 13, and Kristeva About Chinese Women, p. 16.

5. Wyschogrod (1990).

6. ibid., p.234.

7. ibid.

8. ibid., p. 235.

9. Kristeva About Chinese Women, p. 35.

10. For a discussion of the abject in relation to the maternal, see Elizabeth Grosz 'The Body of Signification', in Benjamin and Fletcher (eds) (1990), pp.80- 103.

11. Mark C. Taylor Altarity.

12. Kristeva About Chinese Women. p. 35.

13. ibid., p. 36.

14. ibid., p. 16.

15. ibid., p. 35.

16. Kristeva Desire in Language, p.166.

17. Moi (ed) (1986), pp. 187-214.

18. ibid., p.199.

19. This sacrifice is conceptualised either as 'murderous fusion or incorporation' or 'a deadly immobilising division of the sexes in which women have been allocated body, flesh, nature, earth, carnality while men have been allocated spirit and transcendence', as Whitford (1991) writes, p.158.

20. See Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p.106. Irigaray writes of the need for a 'feminine genealogy', necessary for the 'becoming' of women, to be consolidated. The symbolic re-construction of relations which

have been suppressed or repressssed involves a'vertical' relation between mothers and daughters, and a 'horizontal' relation between women being emphasized. With such a genealogy, women could begin to individuate themselves for themselves, and so intervene on the circuit of a sacrificial economy.

21. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 200.

22. ibid., p. 208.

23. ibid., p.192.

24. ibid., p. 191.

25. Kristeva Tales of Love, p. 8.

26. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 194.

27. ibid., p. 210.

28. ibid.

29. At the end of 'Stabat Mater', Moi (ed) (1986), Kristeva writes:

    If a contemporary ethics is no longer seen as being the same as morality; if ethics ammounts to not avoiding the embarrassing and inevitable problematics of the law but giving it flesh, language and jouissance - in that case its reformulation demands the contribution of women.

30. Kristeva About Chinese Women. p. 31.

31. ibid.

32. Irigaray 'The culture of difference', Pli, vol. 3, issue 1, Spring 1990, p.47.

33. 'The gesture in psychoanalysis', in Brennan (ed) (1989).

34. Lechte (1990), pp. 211-14.

35. Kristeva 'Il n'ya pas de maître à langage', (1979). Cited in Lechte (1990), p.214.

36. ibid.

37. Kristeva Tales of Love, p. 30.

38. ibid., p.380.

39. Irigaray 'The gesture in psychoanalysis', in Brennan (1989), p. 129.

40. Kristeva Tales of Love. p. 379.

41. ibid., p. 382.

42. ibid., p. 30.

43. See Moi (ed) (1986), pp. 160-86.

44. Kristeva Tales of Love. p. 38.

45. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 208.

46. Feuerbach (1957).

47. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 210.

48. Whitford (1991). p 46.

49. Irigaray Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p. 122.

50. ibid.

51. ibid., p.123.

52. Irigaray This Sex, p.88.

53. Mitchell and Rose (eds) (1986), pp. 137-48.

54. Irigaray This Sex, p.96.

55. Irigaray Speculum, pp. 191-202.

56. ibid., p.195.

57. ibid. p.192.

58. ibid., p.192.

59. Moi (1985), p. 140.

CHAPTER 4

1. Plato's attempts to keep the artists out of the Republic because of the dangers of 'infection', Kant's resistance to the 'pathological' as unruly and unreliable in the Groundwork and Descartes' attempts to classify the body as the ship piloted by the mind in Meditation VI are instances of the attempt to contain or exile that which threatens the place of reason.

2. The work of the two thinkers is used selectively here; it is my intention to draw upon those aspects of their philosophy directly relevant to a phenomenological understanding of the body and sexuality.

3. The relation between Husserl's phenomenology and the perspectives developed here cannot be covered in detail. However, we can go back to Husserl's statement in the Cartesian Meditations: 'The beginning is the pure and, so to speak, mute experience which is to be articulated in its own sense'. The return to the 'things in themselves' is taken up by existential phenomenologists, at the expense of Husserl's logical and rigorous methodology, to be developed in a more ontological direction. However, they identify the characteristic intentionality of phenomenology as problematic, in that although it illustrates the world as it is presented and constituted by consciousness, intentionality is also a version of dominance of objects and experience. To describe and to objectify is to classify that which is before consciousness with a pre-given meaning. For Husserl, the description of this experience is part of the process of isolating what is specific about the structures of consciousness in general. Levinas and Merleau-Ponty seek to preserve the specificity of the re-description of experience as a way of resisting the universality of Husserl's transcendental consciousness.

4. Lacan Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, pp.71-2.

5. Merleau-Ponty The Visible and the Invisible (1968).

6. ibid. p. 72.

7. ibid., p. 71.

8. ibid., p. 73.

9. See Alphonso Lingis 'Emmanuel Levinas and the Intentional Analysis of the Libido', Philosophy in Context, where he writes:

   The carnal, "object" of erotic desire, is a transcendency aimed at an other, but aimed at in its weakness. This infirmity is essential to the eroticised body, and is not the relative deficiency of an attribute common to oneself and the other, and measured by comparison. Frailty constitutes the substance of the carnal approached in tenderness, as the coefficient of resistance an object opposes to one's grasp is constitutive of its very being as a transcendent entity and an inert object. (p. 62)

10. De Beauvoir The Second Sex. p. 38.

11. In 'The Interwining, the Chiasm', Merleau-Ponty writes:

> For if the body is a thing among things, it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, as we said, it is of them, and this means it detaches itself upon them, and, accordingly, detaches itself from them. (p. 138).

12. ibid., p. 103.

13. ibid., p. 114.

14. Hand (ed) (1989) 'Ethics as First Philosophy', p. 79.

15. In the Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty writes:

> ...bodily existence continually sets the prospect of living before me...my body is what opens me out onto the world and places me in a situation there. (p.165)

16. In The Visible and Invisible Merleau-Ponty writes:

> The 'little phrase', the notion of the light, are not exhausted by their manifestations, any more than is an 'idea of the intelligence'; they could not be given to us as ideas except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the occasion to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating destructive power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart. (p. 150)

17. Flesh of the world, described (apropos of time, space, movement) as segregation, dimensionality, continuation, latency, encroachment...That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world. (p. 248)

18. ibid., p. 134.

19. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching...Why would the synergy not exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and passions fit together exactly...(p. 142)

20. See also Levinas 'The Phenomenology of Eros' in Totality and Infinity, on the shadowy and clandestine realm of the caress.

21. Merleau-Ponty writes:

If we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and see how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it. (p.155)

22. The notion of archaeology, uncovering the meanings already implicit in the framework to regenerate its potentials, is one of the central themes of the thinkers under discussion.

23. Merleau-Ponty The Visible and Invisible, p. 155.

24. See 'the Intertwining; the chiasm', passim, for various metaphors of complementary and intertwined halves: two leaves of being, two halves of an orange, two maps, two lips etc.

25. ibid., p. 142.

26. Levinas' essays on Merleau-Ponty are translated in Johnson and Smith (eds) (1990), pp. 53-66.

27. ibid., p.55.

28. ibid., p. 60.

29. ibid., p. 62.

30. Merleau-Ponty Signs, p. 168.

31. Merleau-Ponty Phenomenology of Perception, p. 170. See also p. 173, where he writes: 'There is history only for a subject who lives through it, and a subject only in so far as he is historically situated.'

32. Levinas p. 58.

33. ibid., p. 59.

34. ibid., p. 64.

35. ibid., p. 65-6.

36. For example, see Martha J. Reineke 'Lacan, Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray, reflections on a specular drama' Auslegung (1987), essays in Allen and Young (eds) The Thinking Muse, Sandra Lee Bartky 'Towards a phenomenology of feminist consciousness' in Vetterling and Braggin (1978).

37. Allen and Young (eds) The Thinking Muse (1989).

38. ibid., p. 54.

39. ibid., p. 58.

CHAPTER 5

1. Merleau-Ponty 'The Intertwining, the Chiasm', in The Visible and the Invisible, pp. 130-55.

2. The translations of quotes from Éthique de la différence sexuelle which follow are mine. A full translation of the text is forthcoming from Columbia University Press, translated by Carolyn Burke.

3. ibid., p. 168-170.

4. This notion will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter in relation to Levinas.

5. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Chapter 8.

6. Irigaray Éthique, p.171.

7. As we saw in Chapter 2, this analysis is in keeping with Lacanian theory concerning the suppression/repression of the feminine/maternal.

8. Irigaray Éthique, p.144.

9. ibid.

10. This regenerative possibility is discussed in Irigaray Sexes et parentés, Paris, Minuit, 1987.

11. Merleau-Ponty, 'The intertwining, the Chiasm', p. 134.

12. ibid.

13. ibid., p. 136.

14. Although much of the critique is directed at 'auto-affection' as the problem of the socio-symbolic as masculine, Irigaray is arguing that such auto-affection is denied to women. Therefore, she suggests this is a necessary aspect to be developed. However, the 'two lips' are not reductively biological; as Whitford (1991) shows, they are open to very different interpretations: variously, as metaphorically subversive of the Lacanian 'black hole', the 'nothing to be seen' of women as a reference to the possibility of women speaking, as a deconstructive 'undecidable' etc. Whitford quotes Irigaray from Parler n'est jamais neutre, where she writes:

> To seek to discover-re-discover a possible imaginary for women through the movement of two lips re-touching...does not mean a regressive recourse to anatomy or to a concept of 'nature', nor a recall to a genital order - women have more than one pair of lips! Rather it means to open up the autological and tautological circle of systems of representation and their discourse so that women may speak (of) their sex [parler leur sexe]. (p.272). See also The Irigaray Reader, p. 94.

15. Merleau-Ponty refers to 'an element, a general thing', and 'an incarnate principle of a style of being' p. 139.

16. See Speculum, passim. The metaphor of the mirror is a complex one in the context of Irigaray's work, since it is used to 'reflect' back to philosophy some of its pre-suppositions, refracting them in the process; to 'mimic' the extent to which women have been a mirror for men; to draw attention to the dominance of specular imagery in philosophical discourse...etc.

17. Irigaray, Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p.160 and 168.

18. Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and Invisible, p.131.

19. See also the essays by Butler and Young in Allen and Young (eds) (1989).

20. 'in-fini'; meaning both unfinished and infinite.

21. See Kristeva Powers of Horror, an essay on abjection. Kristeva writes:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. (p.1)

22. The distinctions between sacred and profane correspond to the distinctions between divine and carnal in Irigaray's work, and as both thinkers show, to the distinction between feminine and masculine. Kristeva indicates this with her cultural critique of religious discourses, whereas Irigaray focusses on philosophers who have dealt with the question of transcendence in an onto-theological context.

23. Kristeva, Powers of Horror, p.10.

24. ibid.

25. Irigaray's discussion of bodily fluids is meant to draw attention to the 'unnameable' elements of philosophical discourse. But it is also referable to Sartre's discussion of 'holes and slime' at the end of Being and Nothingness, where he claims the ambiguity of that which is neither solid nor liquid, neither within the body nor outside it, is ontologically repulsive, because it is undecidable. This elision is suspicious on two counts; first because Sartre goes on to identify this undecidability with 'the feminine' (and so women), and second, because he is claiming it is a fundamental ontological disgust at ambiguity, a claim at odds with his affirmation of the ambiguity of existence.

26. Irigaray Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p. 159. See also Whitford (1991), p. 163.

27. ibid., p.152.

28. ibid., p.141.

29. ibid., p.140. It is interesting that of the philosophers who discuss the notion of attentiveness, we may note Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt and Iris Murdoch.

30. ibid., p.139.

31. Merleau-Ponty 'The intertwining, the chiasm', p.269.

32. ibid., p. 155.

33. ibid., p. 183.

34. In This Sex, Irigaray writes: 'How then are we to try to redefine this language work that would leave room for the feminine?' (p. 77).

35. Irigaray Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p. 165.

36. Merleau-Ponty 'The intertwining, the chiasm', p. 168.

37. ibid., p. 155.

38. ibid., p. 207.

39. ibid.

40. ibid., p. 208.

41. ibid., p.209.

42. ibid., p.208.

43. See Lefort's essay in Johnson and Smith (1990), pp. 3-14.

44. ibid., p.5.

45. Merleau-Ponty 'The intertwining, the chiasm', p. 149.

46. Lefort, p.6.

47. ibid., p.12.

48. See Kruks (1986) for a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's anti-colonial political philosophy. See Robert Bernasconi's essay in Johnson and Smith (1990) for the argument that Merleau-Ponty's political philosophy and his phenomenology cannot be separated; i.e. that his critique of colonialist politics is connected to his critique of the intentionality of phenomenology.

49. Wyschogrod (1989), pp. 139-50.

50. Merleau-Ponty The visible and the invisible, p.10.

51. Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language, p. 154.

52. Lingis (1978), p.66.

53. Wyschogrod (1989), p.52.

54. ibid.

CHAPTER 6

1. Irigaray, Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p. 119.

2. Irigaray, Speculum, p.165.

3. Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 49.

4. Ethics and Infinity, p. 66.

5. See Moi (1986), for example, and Plaza (1978). As Whitford (1991) notes, this interpretation was the predominant one in Irigaray's initial reception in Anglo-American feminist theory.

6. From Levinas' title Otherwise than Being.

7. Otherwise than Being, p.89.

8. 'Time and the Other', in Hand (ed) (1989), pp. 37-58, p.49.

9. ibid. For comments on Levinas and the feminine, see Tina Chanter 'Feminism and the Other', and Noreen O'Connor 'The Personal is Political; discursive practice of the Face-to-Face', in Wood and Bernasconi (eds) (1988); Catherine Chalier Figures du féminin; lecture d'Emmanuel Levinas (1982), and Wyschogrod (1974), pp. 117-20. For comments on Irigaray and Levinas's 'feminine', see Grosz (1989), pp. 141-58 passim, Whitford (1991), pp. 151-161 passim.

10. Hand (ed) (1989), p.48.

11. ibid., p. 49.

12. i.e. the symbolic network which inscribes woman as other.

13. ibid., p. 54.

14. Simone de Beauvoir points to this understanding of Levinas when she quotes from 'Time and the Other'on 'the feminine' in a footnote in The Second Sex, and comments:

> 'I suppose that Levinas does not forget that woman, too, is aware of her own consciousness, or ego. But it is striking that he deliberately takes a man's point of view, disregarding the reciprocity of subject and object. When he writes that woman is mystery, he implies that she is mystery for man. Thus his description, which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege.' (p.15).

As already suggested, it is not a simple 'reciprocity' which would correct this fundamental asymmetry, as de Beauvoir thinks. But she is pointing out the difficulties of characterising woman as other, and of activating 'the feminine' in the process.

15. Totality and Infinity, p.256.

16. 'Time and the Other', in Hand (ed) (1989), p. 51.

17. In Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), pp. 11-48.

18. ibid., p. 44.

19. Braidotti (1986), p. 2.

20. See Catherine Chalier 'Ethics and the feminine', in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), pp. 119-29, for a discussion of this notion.

21. 'Fécondité de la caresse', in Éthique de la différence sexuelle, pp. 178-99. Translated by Carolyn Burke as 'Fecundity of the Caress' in Richard Cohen (ed) Face to Face with Levinas (1986), pp. 231-57.

22. ibid., p. 239.

23. ibid.

24. ibid., p. 240.

25. See also 'Sexual difference' in Moi (ed) (1988), p. 129, where Irigaray writes:

> Something of the consummation of sexual difference has still not yet been articulated or transmitted. Is there not still something held in reserve within the silence of female history: an energy, morphology, growth or blossoming still to come from the female realm? Such a flowering keeps the future open. The world remains uncertain in the fact of this strange advent. See also The Irigaray Reader, p. 176.

26. ibid. p.239.

27. For Levinas' discussion of 'fecundity', see Totality and Infinity, pp. 259-62.

28. ibid. p.240.

29. 'God and the Jouissance of (The) Woman' in Mitchell and Rose (eds) (1985), p.147.

30. 'Introduction II' by Jacqueline Rose, ibid., p. 54.

31. Levinas, Totality and Infinity p.258.

32. Irigaray 'Fecundity of the Caress', p. 237.

33. i.e. 'Otherwise' to the temporal progression of moments as conceived in chronological time.

34. Irigaray 'Fecundity of the Caress' p.241.

35. ibid., p. 246.

36. ibid., p.245.

37. ibid., p.247.

38. ibid., p.246.

39. ibid., p. 241. The exhortation to women to be 'responsible' in the struggle for autonomy is reminiscent of Beauvoir's remarks at the end of The Second Sex. For example, she writes: 'It is all very well not to be duped, but at that point all else begins. Woman exhausts her courage dissipating mirages and she stops in terror at the threshold of reality.' (p.719). Irigaray is not judgemental or condemnatory in this fashion, however.

40. Irigaray 'Fecundity of the Caress', p.240.

41. There is an echo of Heidegger in this conception of the 'authentic' or ethical dimension of poetic language in this respect, and a need for 're-immersion in the elemental'. But Irigaray again points to an unacknowledged debt to the feminine, a critique which she expands through the element of air. See Irigaray's L'oubli de l'air, on Heidegger, or Graybeal (1990), or Carolyn Burke 'Romancing the Philosophers' in Hunter (ed) (1989), pp. 226-40.

42. Irigaray This Sex, p. 78.

43. Nye (1986), p.127.

44. Chanter in Bernasconi and Wood (eds) (1988), p. 34.

45. For an account of the complex relation between Heidegger and Levinas, see Wyschogrod (1974). See Levinas' remarks on Heidegger, for example, in 'Meaning and Sense', in Collected Philosophical Papers.

46. Levinas in Hand (ed) (1989), p. 40.

47. ibid.

48. Levinas Otherwise Than Being, p. 170.

49. Irigaray 'Fecundity of the Caress', p. 248.

50. ibid., p. 253.

51. ibid., p. 255.

52. See the discussion of Irigaray's conception of the divine in the following chapters of this study.

53. Irigaray in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), pp. 109-118.

54. ibid., p.110.

55. The (by now famous) footnote in Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics' in Derrida (1981), where Derrida writes: 'let us note in passing that Totality and Infinity pushes the respect for disymmetry so far that it seems impossible, essentially impossible that it could have been written by a woman...(p. 320).

CHAPTER 7

1. We can see this characterisation of the maternal in Kristeva's essays on Bellini and in 'Stabat Mater'. For example, she writes:

   'Cells fuse, split, proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down...Such an excursion to the limits of primal regression can be phantasmically experienced as the reunion of the woman-mother with the body of her mother.' ('Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini', Desire in Language, p. 239.)

   Irigaray writes in many places of the equation of the maternal with the elemental, the liquifying fluidity of, for example, blood, the sea, milk and/or the earth. The metaphor of this elemental uncontainability is discussed in 'The "mechanics" of fluids', for example, where she writes:

   ...it is continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, diffusible...That it is unending, potent and impotent owing to its resistance to the countable...(p.111).

   The contact with the 'elemental' is both an experience of bliss but also of death, in the immersion and loss of identity.

2. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 141.

3. Merleau-Ponty The Visible and the Invisible, p. 267.

4. See Adrian Peperzak 'Beyond Being' 1978, for example, where he writes: 'Autrement qu'être ou au delà de l'essence, which was published in 1974, can be considered as the second opus magnum of Levinas. In more than one regard it continues and develops the main ideas of Totalité et infini and answers - mostly in an implicit way - the main criticisms which were brought against the first book.' (p. 239).

5. Levinas 'There is: Existence without existents' in Hand (ed) (1989).

6. ibid., p. 30.

7. ibid.

8. ibid., p. 31.

9. ibid.

10. ibid., p. 35. Irigaray deals extensively with the equation of maternity and the sea in her quotations from Plotinus in 'Un mère de glace', Speculum, pp. 168-79.

11. Kristeva Desire in Language, p. 237.

12. Levinas, ibid., p. 32 and 31.

13. ibid.

14. ibid.

15. See Chalier (1981), Irigaray 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas' in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), and Wyschogrod (1976), for example.

16. Hand (ed) (1989). p. 32.

17. In Being and Time, Heidegger writes:

> Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine insofar as it 'is' at all. And indeed, death signifies a peculiar possibility of being in which the very being of one's own Dasein is an issue. In dying, it is shown that 'mineness' and existence are ontologically constitutive for death. Dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially. (p. 249).

18. Hand (ed) (1989), p. 31.

19. For example, Kristeva writes of this experiential realm as '...the polymorphic body, desiring and laughing'. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 141. In 'La Mystérique, Irigaray writes: 'she is cut to the quick within this shimmering underground fabric that she had always been herself, though she did not know it. And she will never know it or herself clearly as she takes fire, in a sweet confusion whoses source cannot at first be apprehended. She is torn apart in pain, fear, cries, tears, and blood that go beyond any other feeling.' Speculum, p. 193.

20. Levinas, Totality and Infinity. p. 139.

21. See Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', Collected Philosophical Papers, p. 52, where he writes:

> When Heidegger calls attention to the forgetting of Being, veiled by the diverse realities it illuminates, a forgetting for which the philosophy developed from Socrates on would be guilty, a regime of power more inhuman than mechanism (and which perhaps does not have the same source as it; it is not sure that National Socialism arisesfrom the mechanist reification of men, and that it does not rest on the peasant rootedness and the feudal adoration of subjugated men for the masters and lords who command them). This is an existence which takes itself to be natural, for whom its place in the sun, its ground, its site, orient of all signification - a pagan existing.
>
> See also 'Heidegger, Gagarine, et nous', Difficile Liberté, pp.255-9.

22. p.53.

23. Levinas Otherwise Than Being, p. 164.

24. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 120.

25. Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), p. 113.

26. Irigaray Divine Women, p. 1.

27. See Amante marine, Passions elementaires, and L'oubli de l'air, in particular.

28. Irigaray L'oubli de l'air, p. 130.

29. See 'There is; from existence to existents', in Hand (ed) (1989).

30. See Levinas 'The Dwelling', in Totality and Infinity, pp.152-68.

31. See Genevieve Lloyd (1986), where she draws attention to the oppositional place of the Family and the private sphere for Hegel. She quotes from The Phenomenology of Spirit, Sections 144-76:

> Womankind - the everlasting irony (in the life) of the community - changes by intrigue the universal end of the government into a private end, transforms its universal activity into the work of some particular individual, and perverts the universal property of the state into a possession and ornament for the Family.

See also Irigaray's essay in Speculum 'The Eternal Irony of the Community' pp. 214-27.

32. See Levinas' discussion of pain, suffering and death in 'Time and the Other', in Hand (ed) (1989), pp. 39-42.

33. Levinas Totality and Infinity, p.152.

34. ibid., p. 149.

35. ibid., p. 150.

36. ibid., p. 151.

37. ibid., p. 155.

38. Irigaray Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p.105.

39. ibid., p. 115.

40. Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), p. 113.

41. ibid., p. 114.

CHAPTER 8

1. Irigaray writes in Amante Marine:

   From this reserve, all forms are born. She brings it to the world, she 'produces'. All new figures are born from between her lips: a glowing/embrace detaches itself from this touch and becomes 'visible'. (p.98).

2. In 'Women's Time' Kristeva writes;

   ...by demanding recognition of an irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex, and ,as such, exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way non-identical, this feminism situates itself outside the linear time of identities which communicate through projection and revindication. Such a feminism rejoins, on the other hand, the archaic (mythical) memory and, on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements. (p.194-5).

3. In terms of finding spaces within the 'logos' for the other to be heard, in Figures du féminin, Catherine Chalier writes:

   To write grammar otherwise or to invent some surprising faults is not to wish a reversal of that determination. It is not a defiance equating itself with pride. It is to beco me aware that language is not a simple modality of thinking. That the logos is not neutral, as Levinas had also recognised. That the difficulty confronting him, in his election - which seems to him that which cannot be exceeded - of using the Greek site in order to make a thought which comes from elsewhere be understood is not perhaps foreign to a certain mutism of the feminine. As if the surprise of another syntax loses its way in the necessity of borrowing the path of a unique logos. p. 97.

4. See Heidegger Being and Time.

5. See Irigaray L'oubli de l'air, and Levinas 'Time and the Other', in Hand (ed) (1989).

6. See Leonardo Boff The Maternal Face of God.

7. Irigaray This Sex. p. 97.

8. Irigaray 'Divine Women', p. 11.

9. ibid.

10. Feuerbach The Essence of Christianity.

11. Nietzsche's discussion of religion, his 'psychologising' and 'historicising' of apparently eternal values, corresponds to Feuerbach's position in this respect.

12. Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p. 91.

13. ibid. Feuerbach writes:

> Flesh and blood is life and life alone is corporeal reality. But flesh and blood is nothing without the oxygen of sexual distinction. The distinction of sex is not superficial...A moral God apart from nature is without basis; but the basis of morality is the distinction of sex. (p.92).

14. See Engels Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, London, Martin Lawrence, or Marx 'Theses on Feuerbach' in the same volume, no date given.

15. For example, in 'This sex which is not one' Irigaray writes:

> Whence the mystery that she represents in a culture that claims to enumerate everything, cipher everything by units, inventory everything by individualities. She is neither one nor two. She cannot, strictly speaking, be determined either as one person or two. She renders the definition inadequate. Moreover, she has no 'proper' name. And her sex organ, which is not a sex organ, is counted as no sex organ.

16. Irigaray 'Divine Women', p. 4.

17. Irigaray This Sex, p. 77.

18. Irigaray 'Divine Women', p. 3.

19. ibid., p. 11.

20. See Lacan 'God and (The) jouissance of the Woman', where he writes: 'And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as supported by feminine jouissance?',in Mitchell and Rose (eds) (1986), p. 147.
The connection which Levinas makes between the feminine/maternal and the divine will be discussed shortly.

21. Lacan in Mitchell and Rose (eds) (1986), p. 140.

22. Lacan Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p. 59.

23. Irigaray 'Women, the sacred and money', Paragraph, p. 6.

24. See Bibliography for more detailed references to these works.

25. Kristeva Tales of Love.

26. Irigaray This Sex, p. 77.

27. Irigaray Speculum p. 197.

28. Irigaray 'Divine Women', p. 8.

29. Levinas Totality and Infinity.

30. ibid.

31. ibid., p. 276.

32. Lacan Ecrits, p. 117.

33. Levinas Collected Philosophical Papers, p. 127.

34. Levinas Totality and Infinity, p.259.

35. Richard Cohen Time and the Other, (Introduction) p. 11.

36. Levinas Otherwise Than Being, p.74.

37. ibid., p. 185.

38. Hand (ed) (1989), p. 104.

39. Levinas Otherwise Than Being, p.74.

40. ibid., p. 75.

41. ibid.

42. ibid.

43. ibid., p. 72.

44. ibid., p. 75-6.

45. Levinas Collected Philosophical Papers, p. 146.

46. Old Testament, Jeremiah, 31:20. This verse is translated misleadingly in the King James as follows:

    Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still, therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.

    The implications of maternal care and responsibility and God's apparently faulty omniscience strikes a curious note in this verse.

47. Levinas Time and the Other, p. 11.

48. Levinas Otherwise Than Being, p. 109.

49. ibid., p. 195.

50. ibid., p. 77.

51. Irigaray Speculum, p. 234.

52. Irigaray 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas' in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), p. 114.

53. Derrida 'Violence and Metaphysics', in Writing and Difference.

54. ibid., p. 139.

55. Kevin Hart The Trespass of the Sign.

56. See Levinas Otherwise Than Being, passim.

57. Levinas Collected Philosophical Papers, p. 104.

58. ibid.

59. ibid., p. 105.

60. ibid., p. 104.

61. ibid.

62. Irigaray 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), p. 114.

63. ibid, p. 113.

64. See p. 116 of 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas, where Irigaray writes: 'When it is not traditional metaphysics, what governs the ethical order in Levinas is fundamentally a law deriving from God.'

65. Irigaray 'The Fecundity of the Caress' in Cohen (ed) (1986), p.248.

66. ibid., p. 256.

CHAPTER 9

1. See the perspective developed in Chapter Two with respect to Michèle Le Doeuff's notion of an 'operative viewpoint',

2. Merleau-Ponty Phenomenology of Perception, p. 20.

3. Jacques Derrida 'Violence and Metaphysics', in Writing and Difference, p. 84.

4. Edith Wyschogrod Saints and Post-modernism p. 158.

5. See David Boothroyd 'Responding to Levinas' in Bernasconi and Wood (eds) The Provocation of Levinas, pp. 15-32, where he discusses the relation of Levinas' religious thinking and his phenomenological/empirical approach, concluding that to try and resolve this tension is to artificially distort Levinas' thought. See also Catherine Chalier Figures du féminin, where she expands upon the 'Hebraic' element of Levinas' thought in relation to the feminine.

6. Catherine Chalier Figures du féminin, final section 'Une langage de passage', pp. 139-46.

7. Levinas Difficile liberté, p. 137, cited in Chalier, p. 140.

8. Chalier, p. 142. See also Kristeva's essay 'Women's Time', where she writes: 'It might also be added that this linear time is that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of its own enunciation - death.' p. 192.

9. Chalier, p. 142. See also Levinas' important essay 'To love the Torah more than God', for a discussion of the relation of ethical/sacred texts and an 'absent' notion of God and justice.

10. See the final section of Catherine Chalier's book Figures du féminin, where she writes:

> ...prior to any confrontation with the logos, the woman has a sense like a 'pre-originary responsibility', which does not limit freedom, but is otherwise to the alternatives of free/not free. This sense is positioned in the anteriority of time, given a name apart from the present and the proper, when spirit, in its ethical essence, assumes the trace of the Other. Translating this language into the daylight would be the Saying of the ethical body of the feminine. An

inscription into the Said of that which is absolutely surprising. (p. 149).

11. Levinas 'Judaism and the Feminine Element', p. 32.

12. ibid., p. 32.

13. ibid., p. 33.

14. ibid., p. 34.

15. ibid., p. 35.

16. ibid.

17. ibid., p. 35.

18. See particularly Irigaray's 'elemental' texts and 'Divine Women'. Kristeva deals with this topic in Tales of Love. For example, see 'A Holy Madness: He and She', an essay on the Song of Songs, which discusses the process by which an 'erotic' text became sacred, the Rabbinic discussions and interpretations which were offered as to its meaning (literal, allegorical or religious) and which in turn influenced the understanding of love as erotic and/or religious.

19. See Irigaray's essay 'Culture of Difference', where she writes: 'It is very pathological for girls to always be faced with mother-son representations, notably in the religious dimension. To all women in the Christian tradition I suggest, for example, that they put in the communal rooms of their homes, in their own rooms, and in their daughters, an image representing Mary and her mother Anne.' p. 49.

20. Irigaray Amante Marine, passim.
See David Krell Postponements (1986), pp.15-31, where he discusses Nietzsche's 'employment' of the Ariadne figure, quoting from a note made by Nietzsche in 1882:

    Labyrinth.
    A labyrinthine human being never seeks the truth, but - whatever he may try and tell us - always and only his Ariadne. (p. 26).

    The suggestion of a search for this 'feminine' version of truth corresponds to Nietzsche's own project, and to Derrida's exposition of labyrinthine significations in Spurs. The feminine 'averts' in and of itself, refusing to be co-opted for affirmative or destructive readings (which includes these readings). But see Irigaray Amante Marine, pp. 60-63, for example, for her feminist questioning of this strategy.

21. Irigaray 'The Eternal Irony of the Community', Speculum, pp. 214-26. She writes:

    Woman is the guardian of the blood. But as both she and it have had to use their substance to nourish the universal consciousness of self,

it is in the form of bloodless shadows - of unconscious fantasies - that they maintain an underground subsistence. (p. 225).

22. See Gayatri Spivak 'Displacement and the discourse of woman', where she suggests that the 'professional' woman philosopher is an Athena figure, ambivalently situated in relation to the 'masculine' discourses of deconstruction. She writes; (p.174),

'Women armed with deconstruction must beware of becoming Athenas, uncontaminated by the womb, sprung in armour from the Father's forehead, ruling against Clytemnestra by privileging marriage, the Law that appropriates the woman's body over the claims of that body as Law.'

23. Irigaray Amante marine, p. 90.

24. Elizabeth Grosz Sexual Subversions, p. 162.

25. See Kristeva About Chinese Women, where she writes:

Let us note only that by establishing itself as a symbolic principle of community - paternalistic, moralistic, beyond ethnic consideration, beliefs and social loyalities, monotheism represses - along with paganism - the greater half of agrarian civilisations and their ideologies: women and mothers. (p. 18).

26. In Tales of Love, Kristeva traces the complex evolution of conceptions of love through Plato, the Bible, Ovid, Plotinus, Paul, Aquinas and female mystics. Her stated intention is to uncover and reinvent the significant place discourses of love occupy, through its cultural manifestations.

27. Kristeva About Chinese Women, p. 19.

28. Kristeva Powers of Horror, Irigaray 'The Mechanics of Fluids', This Sex, pp.106-18.

29. Kristeva Powers of Horror, p. 91.

30. See Catherine Chalier Figures du féminin, Chapter 5.

31. See Levinas 'Judaism and the Feminine Element', for this reference.

32. Levinas 'Judaism and the Feminine Element', p. 34.

33. Tina Chanter 'Feminism and the Other', in Bernasconi and Wood (eds), p. 49.

34. Plato The Symposium, p. 61.

35. ibid., p. 64.

36. Levinas 'Judaism and the Feminine Element', p. 35.

37. Kristeva 'Stabat Mater', in Moi (ed) (1986).

38. Marina Warner Alone of All Her Sex; The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary. London, Picador, 1981.

39. Kristeva p. 182-3.

40. ibid., p. 175.

41. ibid., p. 182.

42. ibid., p. 162.

43. See Irigaray 'L'Amour entre Passion et Civilité', where she offers different interpretations of the Annunciation. She suggests this scene is too often read such that Mary is the possession or property of the Lord, 'used' as vessel for God's Son. Another way to read it might stress the communing space between physical and spiritual, the exchange of words and of both masculine and feminine, she suggests, emphasising the bird, angel, breath or air, a possibility which is more creative and 'redemptive'. (pp. 220-2), in J'aime à toi (1992).

44. See Feuerbach The Essence of Christianity, where he writes: 'Love is in and by itself essentially feminine in nature. The belief in the love of God is the belief in the feminine principle as divine...Protestantism has set aside the Mother of God; but this deposition of Women has been severely avenged...The anthopomorphism is certainly veiled when the feminine being is excluded... (p. 72).

45. ibid., pp.69-73.

46. Levinas 'Judaism and the Feminine Element', p. 36.

47. ibid., p. 37.

48. ibid., p. 36.

49. ibid., p. 38.

50. ibid., p. 37.

CHAPTER 10

1. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 177.
2. See 'Stabat Mater', in Moi (ed) (1986), pp. 160-86.
3. ibid., p.199.
4. Irigaray Le corps-à-corps avec la mere, p. 81, cited Whitford (1991), p. 77. See also The Irigaray Reader, pp. 34-46.
5. René Girard Violence and the Sacred (1977). Irigaray discusses Girard in relation to the scapegoat in Divine Women (1986).
6. Irigaray, 'Women, the sacred and money' (1986), p. 6.
7. ibid., p.7.
8. ibid., p. 8.
9. Kristeva Tales of Love, p. 96.
10. ibid., p. 97.
11. ibid., p. 147.
12. ibid.
13. ibid., p. 144.
14. ibid., p. 142.
15. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 177.
16. ibid.
17. Irigaray's recent work has focussed more in this direction. See 'The culture of difference' Pli (1990), or the interview with Irigaray in Raoul Mortley French Philosophers in Conversation, London, Routledge, 1990.
18. Gallop (1982).
19. ibid., p. 113.
20. Irigaray Éthique de la différence sexuelle, p. 103.
21. Irigaray 'Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre', p. 9-10, cited Gallop (1982), p. 114.
22. See n.2 above.

23. Sara Ruddick Maternal Thinking, London, Routledge, 1990. Sara Ruddick's book modifies her earlier position in the article 'Maternal Thinking' Feminist Studies, no. 6, vol. 2, Summer 1980. She argues that 'maternal thinking' is a mode of approaching intersubjective relations with the intention of preservation and nurturing. It is a social practice rather than a biological impulse, a practice she suggests can be expanded by feminist politics into a generalised mode of approaching others. However, questions still remain concerning the relation between sex and gender roles, as she characterises them. She writes 'Although maternal thinking arises out of actual child-caring practices, biological parenting is neither necessary nor sufficient'. What then is the connection between women as mothers and the social task of childrearing? She also omits to question the extent to which such models or roles are capable of being re-shaped for her feminist project, which brings into question the conditions of representation. Maternal thinking may be a social practice, but if so, it may also be an ideologically shaped role which is oppressive.

24. Nancy Chodorow The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, University of California Press, 1978. Chodorow focuses on aspects of maternal care which are both damaging and preservative or nurturing. Women learn to be mothers through having been daughters. A feminist understanding of this process would intervene on the circuit to understand its ambiguities. Chodorow draws upon object relations psychoanalysis for her theory. While this approach allows her to engage with intersubjective relations, I find it to be too quickly dismissive of 'intrapsychic' divisions and the undermining effect of the unconscious, and the extent to which socio-symbolic structures are ideological and not transparent meanings to be self-consciously manipulated.

25. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 184-5.

26. ibid.

27. Rousseau (1984) and (1968).

28. Rousseau Discourse on Inequality, p. 72.

29. ibid., p.65.

30. Rousseau Emile, in Cranston (ed) (1989), pp.158-203.

31. ibid., p. 197.

32. Lloyd (1986), 'Rousseau, the lost reason of the world', pp. 58-64. Carole Pateman The Sexual Contract, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988.

33. Freud Pelican Freud Library Vol 7: On Sexuality.

34. ibid., p.342.

35. Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language, p. 110.

36. The work of Levinas (and also that of Adorno) is explicit in making this link between totalitarian ideologies and totalising thinking. The priority of rationality and the inexorable course of history as the self-justification of its progress is seen as resting on the implicit suppression of difference and otherness. Both thinkers are united in reading the Hegelian system in this way.

37. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 185.

38. ibid.

39. For example, see Margaret Atack 'The other; feminist' in Paragraph vol. 8, October 1986, where she writes:

> In feminists' discussions of Kristeva's work, a major topic has been the question of whether her analysis of the specifity of women's position in relation to the signifying practices constituted by the symbolic and the semiotic is an old essentialism under a new guise, effectively recycling a traditional, patriarchal inscription of women as marginal, outside/beyond Reason, and determined by mysterious forces of biology and nature...
>
> Atack adds that she shares some critics' suspicions about Kristeva, 'faced with the nature of Kristeva's frequent and cate orical pronouncements on what constitutes female specificity, on women's political action, on motherhood as a threshold between nature and culture. It is undeniable that assertion about the virilisation of women in power, of the phallic instances of feminism, are on the face of it closer to sexist clichés than to theory...It takes a lot of good will to keep referring such pronouncements back to their place in the system as a whole...p. 26.

40. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 180.

41. Braidotti (1991), p. 219.

42. Moi (ed) (1986), p. 182.

43. ibid., p. 178.

44. ibid., p. 179.

45. ibid., p. 145.

46. Kristeva 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', Desire in Language pp. 237-70.

47. Grosz (1989), p. 81.

48. Kristeva Desire in Language p. 251.

49. ibid., p. 238.

50. ibid., p. 239.

51. ibid., p. 262.

52. ibid., p. 225.

53. ibid., p. 231.

54. ibid., p. 243.

55. See Irigaray Divine Women.

56. Jean-Luc Nancy 'Of Divine Places' Paragraph, p. 8.

57. Gallop (1982), p. 123.

58. Kristeva Tales of Love, p. 81.

CHAPTER 11

1. Bernasconi and Critchley (eds) (1991), p.54.
2. ibid., p.53.
3. Levinas Totality and Infinity, p. 255.
4. Kristeva About Chinese Women, p. 38.
5. Levinas 'Ethics as First Philosophy' Hand (ed) (1989).

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